STEPS TO FAITH.

ADDRESSES ON SOME POINTS IN THE CONTROVERSY WITH UNBELIEF.

BY THE

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I.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN.

"Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness."—ACTS xiv. 17.

IT may at first seem strange that the advocate of Theism, who takes in hand to give some account of the famous Argument from Design, is unable to find in the Bible any statement which exactly suits his purpose, as a starting-point, or brief enunciation of the subject. But the reason of this will be found by a moment's reflection. The object of the Argument is to prove, more or less convincingly, the existence of God. But the Bible never attempts to prove that God is. His existence is always taken for granted in the sacred Scriptures. From the first page to the last God is their great assumption; a real atheist, that is, a person who does not believe in any God at all, is a phenomenon which they do not take into account, do not, we might

almost say, conceive possible. Even when the Psalmist scornfully exclaims, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," he evidently means, not the theoretical atheist who denies God's existence altogether, but the practical atheist, who thinks that God does not see or care, and therefore need not be feared by the sinner. The atheists of the Bible are those who say, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." They are not bold enough, or insane enough, to declare that there is no God; but they think so unworthily about God as to flatter themselves that their sins will escape His notice, or be passed over without punishment.

Accordingly, when the writers of the Bible appeal to the witness which Nature bears to God, it is not to prove His bare existence, but to raise men to worthy conceptions of His greatness, His wisdom, and His goodness. God being taken for granted as the eternal Source of all being, the works of His hand are His witnesses, and proclaim what manner of Being He is. If He made the heavens and the earth and all things therein, must He not be so mighty and so wise as to be infinitely above being likened to dumb images moulded by man's art and set up for worship? If all the tribes of living things are sustained

by Him, must He not be a bountiful Father, caring for His creatures, and above all for His human children? If He fashioned the ear, must He not Himself be able to hear? if He formed the eye, must He not Himself be able to see? Only let it be granted that God is, and that Nature is His handiwork, and such inferences are irresistible. Accordingly, when the idolaters of Lystra took Paul and Barnabas to be the gods come down to them in the likeness of men, and were about to offer sacrifice to them, the apostles had an impregnable ground of remonstrance in the absurdity of identifying men of common human infirmities with the great Being who "made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein," and who had not left Himself without witness of His goodness as well as His greatness, "in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

So is it with all the appeals in the Bible to the witness of Nature to God. They are not used for the purpose of demonstrating the existence of God, but for the purpose of teaching men to think worthily of Him whom they confess to exist, and to be the Author and Sustainer of all. But we are on totally different ground when we endeavour to meet the atheist with the

Argument from Design. In Scripture God and Nature are the two premisses of the argument, the confessed facts on which it proceeds, and Nature is used to rectify and enlarge man's conceptions of God. But with us the only premiss, the only given fact, is Nature; and our business is to put it in such a light as to create the belief, that there must be an infinitely great and wise Being whose work it is; that is, that there must be a God. On the Scriptural ground of argument we take the ignorant, superstitious idolater, who believes in a God but believes unworthily, and lead him into the open field of Nature; we show him the glorious orbs in the sky, the fair face of the earth, the garniture of herb and flower and forest, the hosts of living creatures; we point out the power which grasps and moves the whole wonderful system, the skill which fits one thing to another in countless relations of use and beauty, the goodness which provides sustenance for all breathing and animated things; and we say, See what God must be,—how mighty and wise and good. But in our present argument, while our appeal is still to Nature, it is for a different purpose. We have to go further back, to begin at the very beginning, to assume nothing but what lies before our eyes; and on that we have to build up such proof as we can

that all these visible things could not have come of any blind chance or necessity, but must have had their origin in the will and purpose of some Being who had sufficient skill to design them, and sufficient power to execute the design. And it is because the Bible always assumes what we have to prove, that it does not furnish any text which exactly suits the Argument from Design.

The Argument itself may be very briefly stated. Illustrations of it, indeed, might fill volumes, but the actual Argument lies in a very small compass. It is a single inference from each and all of the myriads of natural objects which evince fitness of relation, adaptation of parts, a conspiring together of different portions to produce a definite result. What is meant by these terms may be most easily understood by thinking of any object, not natural but artificial, to which they apply: that is, of any machine. A watch has long been the favourite illustration. You see in it various wheels and pivots, a frame to hold them in certain positions, a spring to move them, and so on; and these parts are so related to each other and fitted together, as to produce a definite and intended result, namely, the regular motion of a pair of hands so as to mark the lapse of time. Any other machine would serve equally well for an illustration; for all machinery is

constructed of a number of parts, shaped and fitted together so as by their joint action to lead to a definite result. Now what is true in that respect of the structure of these artificial machines is true of every natural organism whatever, great or small; every plant, every animal, is a piece of living mechanism, that is, it is constructed of a number of parts so shaped and related and fitted together as to conspire to produce a certain definite end. Take, for instance, one of the highest class of animals. What an elaborate piece of mechanism its body is! Consider what bones of various shapes and sizes support it, what joints give them free play, what tendons and muscles and ligaments bind them together and move them; what complex organs provide for the necessary nourishment, the circulation and cleansing of the blood, the distribution of nerve-force, the maintenance of the several senses in their wonderful delicacy of perception, the faculty of producing its kind; and besides all these, what a number of necessary relations connect the whole animal with the great cosmic system in which it dwells,—with the amount of heat and light from the sun, the size and density of the earth, the composition and pressure of the atmosphere, the nature of vegetable organisms, and so on; consider all these

characteristics of a single large animal, and you will find packed together within its body a greater quantity of elaborate and exquisite mechanism than is contained in the greatest of our vast workshops, crowded with machines in the construction of which man's highest powers of invention have been taxed to the utmost.

Of things of this kind the world is full; that is, of natural, living mechanisms, more or less complex and wonderful in structure. Earth, air, and water alike swarm with them. Every blade of grass is an instance; every insect, every least atom that has any kind of life, vegetable or animal; and the higher we ascend in the ranks of Nature, the more elaborate and complicated are the organic structures which beset us at every step. No one denies this; it is confessed on all hands, and the evidence of it grows with every growth of natural science. The only question is, What inference can we draw from it?

Let us go back to our artificial machines. Common experience informs us that our workmen construct such things, and that they do not come of themselves by accident, or any sort of self-forming process. Whenever therefore we meet with a machine, however simple, we are sure that it is a thing of human handiwork;

some man's brain devised it, some man's hands made it. It may be only two pieces of stick tied together with a bit of string, and picked up on a mountain's side; yet our inference is immediate and unfailing; we cannot for a moment doubt that it was produced by human intelligence and art. Well, we look now at Nature's organic mechanisms, her elaborate living structures, part fitted to part with exquisite accuracy so as to bring about a definite end; and as we gaze on them, an impression of a similar kind is made on our minds. These, we exclaim, these also cannot be chance-work; here are the plain marks of intelligence, of purpose, of skill; this is mechanism, better even than our best; these are the products of still higher skill. Such is the immediate, unavoidable impression made on our minds. We cannot help feeling it, even though afterwards we might attempt to reason it away. It comes on us irresistibly as we examine these natural, living mechanisms; they strike us at once as bearing the marks of design, of intention, of contriving intelligence; the inference is instantaneous, the facts speak for themselves; our minds by their very constitution leap at once to the conception of an intelligent maker as the only adequate explanation. But who is the maker

in this case? Not man, we are sure; for no human being was ever able to construct the meanest of living things. Some far mightier and more skilful mind and hand must have been at work; some mind able to design, some hand competent to fashion, the amazing, unspeakable universe of being. To this immeasurably skilful and powerful Maker of all things, to whom our minds thus instinctively spring up from the contemplation of Nature, we give the awful name of GOD.

Such is the Argument from Design; and it attains its full force when we take man himself into account, as the choicest product of Nature, the culminating point of the whole series of existences in our world. For not only is the human body the most complex and exquisite in its mechanism of all living structures, and therefore most clearly stamped with the impress of design; besides that, we cannot help feeling that our bodies are instruments designed and fashioned for the use of our real selves. For no one of us thinks that he is his body, or that his body is himself; we are all conscious of a personality which is altogether different from the material organism, residing somehow in it and making use of it, yet entirely different from it in kind, and immeasurably superior to

it. And it is this relation of our body to our real self which gives the finishing touch to the Argument. That every part of the human body indicates purpose, and the whole body is a perfect storehouse of evidences of design, is but half the truth; besides all that, the body has an end worthy of it, and serves a high and noble purpose, in that it is fitted to be the instrument and servant of the conscious, intelligent, spiritual personality which each of us feels himself to be. This, I say, crowns the Argument. We found design impressed on all the orders and ranks of Nature, but till we reached man it might have seemed that there was no sufficient end towards which all the skill and workmanship were directed. Here, in man, is the end, worthy of the whole elaborate purpose; and in the recognition of such an end our minds are satisfied, and the Argument receives its complement and finish.

Thus far I have been trying to put the Argument before you in the simplest way, that you may understand exactly how it proceeds; we have still to consider whether it is really valid and satisfactory, and how far it takes us towards a proof of the existence of God. For of course all atheists deny its validity; they must do so, or cease to be atheists; and when

the late Mr. J. S. Mill, in his posthumous essay on Theism, while rejecting all other arguments for the existence of God, hesitatingly allowed that this Argument does raise a faint presumption or probability in favour of a God of limited power, his atheistical disciples were sadly scandalized at the weakness shown by their master, in conceding to it even that very limited degree of efficacy. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to see what objections may be urged against it.

But before doing this, there is a word to be said. If the Argument from Design were put forward as a strict demonstration, and the objector showed plainly that it is no demonstration at all, but depended on an unproved assumption; then the advocate of Theism, who used the Argument in that sense, would be silenced and confuted. In that way the atheist has often won a momentary triumph, because the Argument is really not of that rigorous kind to which we give the name of demonstration. But such a triumph is no demolition of the Argument itself; this may be perfectly valid in its own proper way, without being a strict logical proof; and while incapable of being set out in the steps of a demonstration which compels assent, it may furnish a very cogent practical reason for believing in God.

Now the objector asserts, first, that the Argument does not cohere, the conclusion does not follow from the premisses. "You argue," he says, "from what you know to what you are entirely ignorant of; from the sphere of your experience to a sphere which lies outside all human experience. You make a leap by means of an assumed analogy, which is at least as likely to be false as to be true. Whenever you see a number of pieces of inanimate material cohering together so as to conspire to the production of a certain result, you rightly enough attribute the machine to human design and intelligence; for it is within your knowledge that such things are made in thousands and millions by mankind, and you know of no other origin of them. But it is not within your experience that plants or animals were ever originated by design or intelligence; no one ever saw a world made, or a living organism constructed; things which grow of themselves differ essentially from structures fashioned by human hands; and therefore when you say that design in these proves design also in those, you are really not arguing, but only making an assumption which there are no facts to support."

That is the first objection, and I believe that it is unanswerable so far as it lies against our

attributing to the Argument from Design a strictly demonstrative force. But if, instead of trying to attack the objection in front, we turn its flank, we shall find it very easy to surmount. Let us fix our minds on that peculiarity of all living organisms, which is common to them and to all our artificial machines; namely, the combination of various parts, so adapted and fitted together as to produce a definite result. The question is, Whence did this arise? To tell us that the ultimate atoms of matter agreed together to arrange themselves in these elaborate and exquisite structures; or that, after millions and millions of years of chance-movements, they happened at last to tumble by a happy accident into these wonderful forms; or that some blind force, unconscious of what it was doing, compelled them to enter into these combinations, is simply to treat us as idiots, and put us off with nonsense. Such explanations explain nothing. There is but one alternative to the supposition of a great intelligence which designed these things; and that is, total and absolute ignorance on our part about their origin. An infinite, designing Mind would be a sufficient explanation; if that be rejected, we know not of any other. Of course, our being shut up by the nature of the case either to accept that single hypothesis of a designing intelligence,

or to confess our entire ignorance about the matter, does not in any way prove that the hypothesis is true: it might be that any knowledge on the subject is beyond our reach. But the fact that there is only one intelligible hypothesis which can explain the mystery is something in favour of that hypothesis in any case; and a great deal in favour of it, if it appears that the hypothesis has its root in, or grows naturally out of, the general bent and constitution of our minds. And that is the case here. Mankind in general have always seen design in the exquisite organisms of the natural world; they have been unable to shut their eyes to it; it has adhered to the facts of nature, and forced itself upon their recognition; their mental constitution, their intellectual instincts, their habits of thought, have compelled them to adopt this interpretation of Nature, and ascribe its countless living mechanisms, its whole array of orderly and beautiful relations, to intelligence and design. That is the general verdict of the human mind on the origin of Nature; and to those who know that all our knowledge rests ultimately on such general verdicts instinctively pronounced by mankind at large, the fact is decisive. Even the great sceptic, Hume, acknowledged the justice of the Argument; and its advocates need add nothing to

the words with which he brushed away the objectors from his path. "The whole chorus of Nature," he says, "raises one hymn to the praise of its Creator. You alone, or almost alone, disturb this general harmony. You start abstruse doubts, cavils, and objections. You ask me, What is the cause of this cause? I know not, I care not; that concerns not me. I have found a Deity, and here I stop my enquiry."—(*Dialogues on Natural Religion*, Part iv.)

There is a second objection to the Argument, a very minute one, which has been founded on alleged irregularities, inconsistencies, blemishes, in Nature. No doubt, there are in some creatures rudimentary organs, which are begun and never completed; superfluous organs, for which we cannot discover a use; there are abortions, incumbrances, eccentricities. Such peculiarities lurk in the nooks and byways of the physical world, in the fringes and skirts of Nature; they are like the specks and flaws which a magnifying-glass discovers in a polished surface. Suppose that we are not able to explain them, or discover what purpose they serve, what then? Are they sufficient to purge design out of Nature, and reduce everything to chance medley? Does the eye cease to be a most exquisite optical instrument, because in some subterranean waters a

small fish has been found in which there is only the rudiment of an eye, skinned over and useless? Is the broad, fair face of the world so blurred and disorganised by these minute irregularities, that order, adjustment, and beauty can no longer be discerned in it? Surely it might as well be argued that a noble palace, with its stately chambers and costly decoration, was nothing more than a freak of chance, or a shapeless mass, because an apparently useless closet or two might be found in it, a stone here or there be loose, or a handful of dust lie in some of its corners!

We have yet one more objection to consider, which is based on the modern theory of Evolution, and is very confidently pressed by atheistical reasoners against the Argument from Design. Whereas the former objections impugned the Argument itself, this lies rather against its applicability to the case; being a plea, not so much that the Argument is in itself invalid, as that there is no room for it,—that it does not apply to the facts of Nature as we now know them. Those who urge this objection say in effect,—"We have found out all about the origin of the natural organisms which fill the world, and their story excludes the idea of their existence being due to anything like design or purpose. Time was, in the immeasurably remote Past,

when nothing existed in Space but a wild whirling vapour of inconceivably minute atoms; this, by virtue of its own physical properties, separated into masses, condensed into solid orbs, cooled down into worlds, struck out rudimentary germs of life; these germs, under the influence of their physical surroundings, went on to produce diverse and superior forms of life, the better varieties of which naturally, in the long run, supplanted the worse; and this process going on by the natural force of things through millions of ages, the divergences and the improvements became imperceptibly wider and greater, until at last the world became what we see it to be now, full of the highly organised and complex structures of both the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Where, then, in all this physical evolution, which has been the necessary outgrowth of certain physical laws, is there the smallest opening by which design or purpose could have entered into the process, unless, indeed, you choose to ascribe intelligence to the original vapour out of which everything has proceeded?"

So speak the modern objectors to the Argument from Design; and the story which they put forth is undoubtedly a very interesting one, and even a very grand one, whether it be truth or fiction, which we need not here dispute. But, supposing it to be true, they seem in their application of it to make

a strange oversight. Everything, they say, proceeded originally from the primordial vapour. That vapour contained in itself the materials of which everything consists, and the potency to produce everything which has ever existed. Not merely all the great kingdoms of Nature, with all their provinces and contents, were implicitly contained in it, but man himself with all his faculties, his hand, his eye, his brain, his intellect, his conscience; heroes, philosophers, poets, saints, all were floating about in that vapour, in a dissolved, elementary state. Wonderful vapour indeed! What strangely endowed atoms must have existed in it, what marvellous forces, what unlimited fecundity of production! But whence did it come? How did it get its properties? How came it to start on its astonishing course? These surely are very appropriate enquiries, but our friends have entirely omitted to answer them. "There is the vapour," they say; "that is all." Is it all? Can that for one instant satisfy any thinking man? If I were to show you a thousand different specimens of beautiful workmanship, and, in reply to your enquiry how such exquisite things were made, were to point to a heap of tools, and say, "There are the makers, that is all;" would you not laugh in my face, and exclaim, "Yes; but who made and who used the tools?" And just in the

same way must we interrogate those who take us back to the original vapour, and tell us, "that is all." That vapour, we must insist, wants explaining, just as much as our existing organisms do. The germs of everything were in it,—well, How did they get there? Precisely as much intelligence and purpose and power must have been required to make a vapour capable of evolving out of itself the amazing procession of living organisms which has moved across the stage of Time, as would have been required to make the organisms themselves at a stroke; whether the vapour was used as a medium of production, or not, can make no difference. We may prolong the process of formation as much as we please; we may remove back the primal starting point to as remote a period as imagination can conceive; but we explain nothing, account for nothing; the cause of all is still to be sought for as much as ever. The marks of intelligence and design are all around us here, stamped ineffaceably on the whole face of the world; take us back to the vapour, and we have not got rid of them; they go back with us, and again confront us in the amazing properties and potencies of that primary stage of being; and no more there than here have we any means of accounting for them except by the hypothesis of an originating Mind.

Such are the three chief objections which have been urged against the Argument from Design; and I think we are entitled to say that they fail to overthrow it in its fair and proper application, and that it continues to point, as it has always done, to a great Intelligence, as the only explanation of the universe which approves itself to the general thought of mankind. There are two things, however, always to be remembered about it; first, that the Argument is not strictly demonstrative, but of the nature of an appeal to the intellectual instincts of our race; and, secondly, that it takes us up to a great intelligent Cause, but not beyond that, as the Source of Being. The conception of God as our God, our living, holy, gracious Father, is not to be got from the physical universe; the presentation of God to our minds through the medium of Nature is limited to the idea of an almighty Mind, the Fountain, the Centre, the Force of all physical existence. For the higher conception of God in His character, as righteous, merciful, true, and fatherly, we must betake ourselves to the presentation which He has given us of Himself in and through man, whom He was pleased to make in His own image. This completes what the physical world leaves incomplete, and leads us on to the true idea of the heavenly Father, who loves us and cares for us.

Begin, therefore, if you need it, with the Argument from Design, as the first step in your search for God; but if you would really find Him, and know His character and grace, rest not there. Press on into the inner sanctuary of spiritual emotion, aspiration, desire, where truth, righteousness, and love are recognised as the highest treasures of immortal beings; and there God will meet you, and manifest Himself to you as the living God, the God of your spirits, the God of all grace, inasmuch as He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II.

BELIEF IN A FATHERLY GOD.

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."—EPHES. iv. 6.

ONE God, who is the Father of all, above all by His universal sovereignty, through all by the universality of His redemption, and in all by the indwelling of His Spirit,—such seems to be the Apostle's thought; and all Christendom, bound together by the common redemption, sharing in the same Divine Spirit, and with one voice crying "Our Father," echoes back the thought in the foundation Article of its creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

Of this belief in a Fatherly God I shall endeavour to speak to you on the present occasion. The subject is, of course, far too wide to be treated in all its branches in a single discourse, and I shall confine myself to two points; first, The practical relation to us of this primary Article of our faith; and, secondly, The evidence by which we

may justify our profession of it against the attacks of unbelievers.

I. My first object will be to make clear the practical bearing on our whole being of the belief in a fatherly God, that we may bring to the discussion of the evidence for it an enlarged sense of its immense, its infinite importance.

It is certain that at the outset of this, as well as of every other discussion, something must be taken for granted. We must have a standing ground, a starting point, something assumed and conceded. Discussions cannot hang unsupported in the air; however far back to ultimate principles we carry them, we cannot get beyond all principles, we cannot begin with nothing. Even geometry cannot stir a step without its axioms, nor logic without mental conceptions; physics require the assumption of an external world perceived by the senses; and throughout the whole range of knowledge the ultimate facts of consciousness are at the bottom of everything. To this general rule Theism can be no exception; and if you ask me what I am going to assume, in order to array its claims before you, my answer is, I assume our *common human nature.*

I do not know whether you will think this a great or a small assumption, but I am sure that the whole question turns upon it. If we did not

believe in ourselves as being real human beings, it would be utterly impossible for us really to believe in God.

But what is meant by our being human? If we were mere bundles of material atoms, curiously compacted together, moved by mechanical and chemical forces, and soon to be broken up again and distributed in other combinations, I should not say that we were human. In that case we should have no free will, no moral faculty, no personality, no real self. By a human being I mean a living, personal self, capable of exercising free will, and sensible of the difference between right and wrong; an intelligent, moral, and spiritual agent, with affections, desires, and hopes that transcend the senses and reach out towards the perfect, the infinite, the eternal. Look into yourselves; review your faculty of will, your conscience, your aspirations, your capacity for religion, your sense of being made for something better than sensual gratification; and you will know what is meant by a real human nature far better than I can describe it to you. Well, what is assumed in the Theistic Argument is, that in this sense we are human beings; and to justify that assumption, all that can be done is to appeal to your own consciousness, and again say, Look into yourselves.

Now, if we are, according to this assumption, real human beings, the doctrine of a fatherly God bears in upon us with an overwhelming force. It is exactly what we want, what the entire humanity in us craves for and finds rest in. For we know that we are not sufficient for ourselves; we cannot sit self-centred, bearing the weight of our own being in joyous self-satisfaction; we want sympathy, guidance, support, comfort, hope; and if these are denied us, the true human element in us hungers and languishes, and we go stumbling along, feeble and distracted, till the great darkness swallows us up. And all this that we want must come from above us; we cannot get it from our fellowmen. They share our want and our weakness, and cannot impart what they do not themselves possess. Far above them, above all that earth holds, our desires stretch out; it is the ideal, the perfect, the infinite, that alone answers to them, and in which alone they can fold their wings and rest.

From above us our help must come; and from One who can feel for us, understand us, act upon us with a moral and spiritual influence. It is in vain that metaphysicians tell us of some necessary, self-existing, infinite Substance, as lying at the root of our ideas about time and space; or of some uncaused primal Cause, on which all the

successive links of causation must depend. It is in vain that we are led up the ascent from narrower to wider laws of the physical universe, till we are landed at last in some single law or force as the origin of the mighty cosmos. In vain, I mean, as to the satisfaction of our real human want, the aspiring of our spiritual nature to find succour and rest. Those impersonal abstractions, call them by what grand names we may, are nothing to our inmost selves; our intellects may play with them, but our hearts will be starving. Can they comfort us in sorrow, strengthen us in temptation, inspire us with nobleness of aim, give us peace and hope in death? No, no! It is not from those that light can break on us; not from those that life can energise in us. From cosmic force, and primal cause, from the unconditioned and the absolute, from abstractions physical and metaphysical alike, we turn away unhelped; and all that is in us which is best and highest cries out for a Divine Helper and Friend—for a living, personal, fatherly God.

Whether such a Being really exists is therefore the question of questions for us,—the question on which all that can in any real sense be called religion depends, with all its hopes, its consolations, its ennobling satisfactions for the

higher part of our nature. We cannot worship and trust in an impersonal, unconscious thing. It is only to a Person who knows us, cares for us, responds to us, acts consciously upon us, is felt by us to be holy and good, that we can lift up our hearts in adoration, gratitude, and confidence. As a great writer of the present century said in one of his letters,[1] "I do not know what to do with a metaphysical God; I will have none but the God of the Bible, who is heart to heart with us." But as soon as we admit the existence of such a Being, and feel His reality as the central fact of the universe, then all that is meant by religion, with all its grandeur and constraining influence over our lives, starts at once into full and perfect action. For then the righteous will of that Being becomes the sacred rule of our conduct, His gracious Providence the firm ground of our trust. For the knowledge which is necessary to feed our higher life we look to revelations from Him; for strength to live worthily, according to the dictates of our spiritual constitution, we depend on His holy influences on our hearts. Out of our relation to Him, as our Father and God, grows our hope of immortality. Belief in a fatherly God is, therefore, the one thing which above all others bears in upon and

[1] Niebuhr.

lays hold of all that is most distinctively human in our complex nature, and is absolutely necessary to reconcile us to ourselves, to give a support to our endeavours and an aim to our aspirations, and to furnish the basis on which alone we can live out really human lives in nobleness and in hope.

II. Having seen with what emphasis this doctrine of a living, fatherly God addresses itself to the faculties which we feel stirring within us, and the wants of which we are conscious, we are prepared to consider the awful question, Is the doctrine true? Comforting, elevating, satisfying, it may be; but is it true? Are we justified in clinging to it ourselves, and proclaiming it to others? Can reason give a verdict in its favour?

Now I do not propose to lay out before you any sort of logical demonstration of Theism. Mankind, we know, came to believe in God long before any philosophical reasoners tried to draw out a formal proof of His existence. They did not argue themselves into the belief; it became theirs of itself, as it were, antecedent to any reasoning about it, or any endeavour to justify it by argument. It was only when some few daring innovators separated themselves from the general mass of their fellowmen, and challenged

them to say why they believed in God, that men set about putting together more or less ingenious or elaborate proofs of their faith. But the proofs were one thing, the belief was another. The proofs might be confused, incomplete, inconclusive,—that was a matter which depended on the clearheadedness of those who framed them; but the belief, rooted in their hearts, might for all that be profoundly true. For my own part, I must confess that I am not very deeply impressed by any of the formal, logical demonstrations of the being of God which have at various times been drawn out, whether by metaphysical or scientific methods. When my own personal spirit is seeking repose and joy in a Supreme Personal Spirit of infinite goodness and grace, I do not see how any abstract reasonings, any series of logical propositions, or any inductions of physical science, can materially help me to discover the object of my desire. Spirit speaks to spirit, personality reveals itself to personality, in far other ways than these. If I am not conscious of God in the depths of my soul, I do not perceive how all the reasonings in the world can compel me to believe in Him.

But if I put aside those formal arguments as insufficient, what, you may ask, is left in the way of definite justification of the great doctrine

of a fatherly God? Let me try to make the answer clear to you.

I have already said that belief in God prevailed among mankind long before any one thought of arguing about it. And I have also endeavoured to show how thoroughly the belief corresponds to the wants of human nature. Now these two facts together point to the real justification of the belief; because they show that the belief is rooted in human nature itself, and grows spontaneously out of it, as something which is essential to its constitution and development; and a stronger justification than that is not possessed by any belief whatever which is held by mankind.

If belief in God, in whatever shape or form, could be shown to be an exceptional thing; if whole nations which were destitute of it could be found in human history; if it were confined to rude and ignorant times, and disappeared before advancing culture and knowledge; if it had never contributed to the elevation of mankind, the growth of morality, the love of truth, and had never inspired the noblest heroisms of which our nature is capable; why, then, one might say that it was an exotic, not a native plant in the soil of humanity;—that it was too partial, too transient, too barren, to make good its claim to

be a genuine, constitutional outcome of human nature, under the training of experience in knowledge and virtue.

But the exact reverse of all this is the case. Wherever and whenever man has been truly man, that is, has manifested in any degree the possession of a nature above mere brute nature, a nature which has a savour of humanity about it, a capacity for moral and spiritual feelings, then and there some sort of belief in God has been inseparable from him. A rude belief, it is true, when man was rude and uncultivated; a belief, in the earlier stages of human culture, often incrusted with polytheistic, idolatrous, degrading superstitions; but there it was in its essence, in the conviction of a superior personal Power on whom we depend, and to whom we are responsible,—a conviction from which escape was impracticable, and which gave birth to religions, moulded polities, institutions, manners, and exercised a dominant influence over the various lines of human development.

Moreover, as mankind advanced in civilization and knowledge, and threw off one by one the rude and gross ideas of its infancy, the belief in God, so far from being discarded or retiring into the background, rose to higher levels of spirituality, rooted itself more deeply in human thought, and

exercised a more controlling influence over human conduct. And its influence has been the most powerful for good that ever has swayed mankind. With everything finest in human nature it has permanently allied itself. It has tempered violence, restrained lust, purified morality, afforded a counterpoise to selfishness, brought into human life that spiritual element which is its glory and crown. Look at the mighty tide of nobler life which belief in God poured down the great Hebrew line of development; follow it still onwards, as in an expanding Christendom it enters on the heritage of the earth, and is the mainspring of Christian civilization; see how everything pure, lovely, heroic, saintly, twines round it, and derives from it its animating force; hear the countless testimonies of believers that in their experience a fatherly God is the greatest of realities, and that of His presence and relation to them they have an abiding consciousness, more intense and more fruitful than their consciousness of any of the objects of sense; and then say if you can doubt that belief in a living, personal, fatherly God is rooted in human nature, is essential to its true development, and is borne witness to as true by all its best and weightiest experience.

This, then, is the justification of belief in God which I wish to place before you. I do not argue

it out as a proposition to be demonstrated. I have no logical proof of it to offer, such as may compel the mere intellectual faculty in us to accept it. I appeal to the general human consciousness and experience, to the deepest spiritual instincts of our nature. I say that this belief has developed itself in man just as his true humanity has developed itself; that it is one of the instinctive, intuitive, primary beliefs of his reason; that it grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength, as he advances along the path of true human culture; that it is proved by experience to be the vital source of his morality, the mainspring of his noblest virtues and heroisms, the solution of his perplexities, the purifier and sweetener of his life, the ground of his eternal hope; and that, being all this, it stands secure on an impregnable rock of experience and of fact, far out of reach of all the weapons, whether metaphysical, logical, or scientific, which can be brandished against it.

Such is my answer to the question, whether we are justified in believing in a fatherly God. I draw the affirmative answer from the consciousness and experience of the human race. I appeal to all that is noblest in the feelings, the convictions, the aspirations, the achievements of mankind at large, and say that if there be no living, personal, fatherly God above us, then existence is an

insoluble enigma, life an idle dream, and human nature itself an imposture and a delusion.

But, as you well know, there are some speculative and ingenious persons who are not satisfied with this justification of our belief. Let me add a few words about their objections.

There are the materialists, who tell us that we are indulging in mere idle talk. What are you, they say, but lumps of matter, conglomerates of the same atoms that stones and plants and jelly-fish are made of? and what is all your fine idealizing about God and religion and morality, but a sort of chemical effervescence, as these atoms of your organism rub together under the stimulus which you call life?

Now I think that we are quite justified in declining to take that kind of reply as serious. As a jest, it may be good or bad according to people's tastes,—I cannot say that it strikes me as having any particular merit even in that sense; but as a serious account of the higher side of human life and experience, of the aspirations of mankind after truth and goodness, of the intense consciousness of God and passionate self-surrender to Him which are characteristic of the saintly souls who have most closely followed Christ,—as a serious account of all these noblest facts of human nature, I am sure that it would be difficult to

match this materialistic explanation in its ludicrous insufficiency and blindness.

But there are other objectors who deserve a more careful answer; those, I mean, who are now known by the name of Agnostics, whose position is, that even if there be a God, which they do not deny to be possible, our faculties are so limited by the constitution of our nature as to render us incapable of ascertaining the fact. Their fundamental tenet is, that we are absolutely and hopelessly ignorant about everything of which no information can be gained through our bodily senses. Our senses, with them, are the only inlets of knowledge, and as the senses are cognizant of physical phenomena alone, all real human knowledge must be limited to the sciences which are formed by sorting and classifying such phenomena, and building them up into systems according to their several kinds. Everything else that we think of or believe is thus consigned to the regions of imagination and emotion, and is held to be destitute of any reality outside the mind, and to be purely subjective, that is, fictitious. Thus an impassable line is drawn between the real and the imaginary; on one side of it stand the so-called positive sciences, the sciences formed by observing and classifying the phenomena of matter, whether organised or unorganised, for it

is such phenomena alone that the senses can discern; and on the other all the objects of religious faith, such as God, the human soul, spiritual truths of all kinds, morality, immortality, revelation, and the like. To the former are ascribed reality, certainty, a firm ground in experience, and they are esteemed the solid, intellectual possessions of our race; while the latter are treated as conceptions begotten of the mind itself, to which, however beautiful or even useful they may appear, no facts of existence can be ascertained to correspond. So that what this Agnostic school practically says to us is this, "Have a religion if you like, only remember that it is but a growth of your own imagination, or a creation of your own emotions; speak of a God if you please, but do not forget that He is but an ideal of your own framing, a poetic fiction of your own thought. The one thing needful is to be true and loyal to the facts which your senses bring to your knowledge, to the physical environment in which you find yourselves existing; and that you can be only by honestly accepting the doctrine, that on all matters which lie outside the sciences based on the observation of material phenomena knowledge is impossible for man, and that all religious beliefs must therefore be purely subjective and incapable of verification."

So speak the Agnostics, cutting us off from the higher world, and condemning us to perpetual imprisonment amidst material and visible things. I am sure that, however plausible such words may appear, everyone who has ever experienced the power of religion must feel that there is some deeprooted fallacy in them. And it lies in the pretended distinction between positive knowledge and religious belief as to the ultimate basis on which each rests. The contrast between the certainty of the one, and the baselessness of the other, has no justification in fact. Both alike depend on the testimony of the human consciousness. Admit that testimony to be veracious, and the witness which it bears to God is as trustworthy as that which it bears to physical things. Deny it your confidence in the one, and you must in consistency distrust it equally in the other. Except for the testimony of our consciousness we have no assurance of our own personal identity, or of the coherence of our reason, or of the existence of the external universe and of our fellow-men. Except for the intuitive perceptions of our higher nature, morality would be a mere name for custom and repute. Accept the root-principle of Agnosticism, and resolutely carry it out to its legitimate consequences, and you will not be able to stop short of the conclusion of the ancient

Pyrrhonists, that human knowledge is no better than an imposture, and that an incurable lunacy affects the universal reason of mankind.

From Agnosticism, therefore, as an intellectual blunder, we may return with unabated confidence to the testimony borne by consciousness and experience to the existence of a personal, fatherly God. In ourselves, in mankind at large, in the fathers of our race from the earliest times, we find the belief substantially rooted; it has grown with the moral and spiritual growth of mankind, and has borne fruit of the noblest kind in the story of human development. An unverified assumption! we should like to know what has ever received a more thorough testing and verification from the widest experience. Always and everywhere, as the annals of our race attest, in proportion to its purity and strength the faith in a living, fatherly God has been among mankind the vital source of their morality, the mainspring of their noblest heroisms, the solution of their most burdensome perplexities, the inspirer of their most elevating hopes. Of that portion of our race which is the most highly developed on the ethical and religious side of our nature, countless numbers have felt God to be the intensest of realities to them, and in the power of their faith in Him have lived lives of

nobleness, and died full of peace and hope. When these say, "We know God, we feel God, we live in and by God," their testimony incalculably outweighs the adverse voices of those who can only protest that for themselves they are unable to conceive of God as anything more than an ideal of the imagination. For my part, when with kindling soul I have traced the mighty, heart-cleansing, life-controlling consciousness of God through the experience of the pure and saintly, the martyrs and heroes of faith, the servants of duty, the enthusiasts of a divine charity, up to its glorious climax in the matchless Christ of the Gospels, and then turn reluctantly to listen to the voices which confidently proclaim the impotence of man to attain to any knowledge of God; I seem to myself to be only hearing one of those tales which, however full of sound and fury they may be, in sober truth signify nothing!

The object of these addresses is both to strengthen believers and to help doubters. The doctrine that all religious beliefs must be consigned to the domain of speculative fancy is now proclaimed with such amazing audacity, that believers who have never given much thought to the question of evidence are liable to be staggered, and visited by an uneasy sus-

picion of the soundness of their faith. And multitudes, it is to be feared, of the young and half educated fall an easy prey to the bold assertions of scepticism. Hence arises the importance of putting in a clear light the ultimate foundation on which our belief in God really reposes. Not on metaphysical arguments, in which you may easily wander till you find the whole ground of religious belief crumbling away beneath your feet. Not on inductions of physical science, for these cannot lead to a living, fatherly God. This God, who is our God, is not to be found in speculations about the infinite, the unconditioned, or the absolute; nor will Nature,—that is, the physical universe,—of itself bring you into His presence. The primary witness to Him is in yourselves; in your sense of personality and free will, in your conviction of the awful sacredness of right and duty, in the voice of your conscience, in the solemn haunting feeling of your responsibility, in the yearning of your souls for the perfect Goodness, in the thrill of sacred emotion which in your best moments is stirred within you by the voice which claims to come from heaven. Begin here, you who doubt; and as you honestly allow this witness, which is echoed back from all pure and saintly souls, to do its work within you,

God will become the grandest, deepest, intensest of realities to you. You will not reach Him at the end of an argument; you will do far better, you will feel Him within yourselves, you will see Him with the eye of the spirit. And then, as you go forth with the sense of the living God within you, above and below, in the heights and the depths, a thousand testimonies will spring forth to corroborate your faith. The heavens will declare to you His glory, the earth will proclaim His wisdom and power, the course of human development the guidance of His righteousness and love. His name will be printed on the skies, and wafted on the breezes, and echoed back from the mountains, and spelt out by every beauteous growth, and every beneficent relation of the natural world. You will wonder how men can wrangle about His existence, when you feel His presence compassing you round about, His voice sounding in your ears, His grace teaching and strengthening your hearts. And to know Him better and better will be your warmest desire. For that you will search the pages of Holy Scripture; above all you will sit at the feet of Christ, who came forth from the Father's bosom, to make Him fully known to His children. There your deep consciousness of God will be trained and ex-

panded; your moral nature will be renewed in His image, in righteousness and true holiness; your thirsting spirit will drink out of His fulness of comfort and peace; you will become strong for duty, wise in counsel, fruitful of help, as servants of the Lord who do His will; and with every increase of His likeness in you, and every fresh line of moulding in His glorious image, you will find yourselves more conscious of His presence, nearer to Him in the fellowship of His Spirit, and ravished with an ever-growing fulfilment of the great beatitude,—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

III.

EVOLUTION AND MAN.

"In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him."—GENESIS v. 1.

ON the present occasion I have to bring before you for consideration a difficulty which modern scientific discoveries, and the speculations growing out of them, have seemed to many to put in the way of our continuing to hold the Christian belief, respecting the spiritual nature of man and his hope of immortality. The discussion of this difficulty will necessarily bring us into contact with those physical sciences which in our age have advanced with unexampled rapidity, and now engage a large share of human thought and energy; and as I may address some to whom those sciences are familiar and dear, and their various results are precious intellectual possessions, I wish frankly to say at the outset, that even the keenest of their students and most enthusiastic of their admirers can scarcely rate

a creature of God who is distinguished from all the rest of the terrestrial creation, not only in degree but in kind, by the possession of a spiritual faculty capable of knowing God, and of serving Him in righteousness and love. As in the earliest book in the Bible, from which my text is taken, so also in the writings of the apostles of Christ, man, and man alone, is declared to have been made in the likeness, the image, the similitude of God. And if we enquire what is meant by this high prerogative, and how far it extends, we learn in the gradual unfolding of revelation respecting man and his calling and destiny, that he is the child of God, to whom belongs the right of crying "Abba, Father;" that he is taken into personal covenant with God, is invited to render to God a voluntary filial obedience, is made a partaker of the divine Spirit, and has the promise of eternal life,—a life over which the death which breaks up his bodily organism shall have no power. According, then, to these representations man stands in a class by himself, marked off by an immeasurable chasm from all the lower creation; while there nothing above the animal nature is to be found, he is lifted into another sphere of existence; he is a personal, immortal being, who bears the stamp of divine sonship, is called into conscious filial

relation to God, and is permitted to look forwards to an everlasting life in spiritual fellowship with his Father in heaven.

Such, according to the teaching of Scripture, is man's high, exclusive prerogative as man; and it is obvious that on the truth of this view of human nature the idea of religion, as presented to us in the Bible, is absolutely dependent, and would fall to the ground as false and absurd, if it could be shown that man, instead of possessing a spiritual faculty and a capacity for immortality, is not essentially different from the animal races beneath him. To ascribe to those ephemeral creatures, whose lives are regulated by the mere instincts and impulses of their physical organisms, any capability for being religious in the scriptural sense, seems to be beyond all reasonable possibility. Let any one who thinks otherwise seriously make the attempt. Let him try to associate in his mind the religious ideas of the Bible with the most sagacious and highly developed animals known to us; taking them with their appetites, instincts, and glimmerings of intelligence in the narrow sphere of their action, let him see if it be not utterly beyond his power to connect with them in any real sense the idea of such religion as is proper to human beings,—to conceive of them as being conscious of God,

partakers of His Spirit, offering themselves to Him in grateful worship and self-devotion, going forth with high moral purpose to serve Him, and looking forwards to an eternity of blessedness in the sunshine of His everlasting goodness. Surely such conceptions as these are so utterly alien from all that we know of the animal, that it must strike one as bordering on irreverence even to suggest for a moment that any part or lot in them is possible for it. But if this be so, it is clear that we must either allow to man the possession of a higher nature than that of the animals to render him capable of the religion taught in the Bible, or else fall back on the supposition that the religion there set forth is an unreal, fictitious thing, and that all its great terms,—God, spirit, holiness, eternal life,—are, at least for man, nothing more than empty words.

This much, then, may be taken as beyond dispute, that any doctrine about the origin and characteristics of human nature, which simply puts man back among the animal races, as belonging to their class and in no way essentially distinguished from them, strikes fatally at the whole conception of religion as unfolded and taught in the Bible. In contending against such a doctrine, we are not disputing about minor

questions of interpretation or inspiration, but are fighting for the very life of Christianity.

And it is against such a doctrine, very confidently put forward in a new shape by the materialists of science, that we have now to contend. How it has assumed its present form I must endeavour first to explain in a simple manner, and then to show that the pretension which it makes to being solidly based on physical science, is destitute of any real validity.

The old conception of the manner and order of Creation, founded on a literal acceptance of the poetic narrative in the first chapter of Genesis, has, as everyone knows, generally given place, under the influence of our modern sciences of Nature, to a view of a very different kind. Creation, at a stroke, of fully developed creatures, and finished within the space of six days, has been replaced in the modern mind by Creation by gradual developments, extending over almost countless stretches of time. Thus, astronomy has led us to believe that the heavenly bodies, instead of having come into existence in a moment, as they are now, by a creative *fiat* of the Almighty, have reached their present state by a very gradual process of condensation from fiery clouds of vapour, spread in the beginning through the boundless fields of space. Then, geology has

shown that our earth, having by such a process become a solid globe, glowing at first with intense heat, gradually cooled down till the surface became fit to be the abode of life; and that the life, both animal and vegetable, which then began upon it, was not like that which peoples it now, but of the most elementary kind; and that it was only by successive stages, probably reaching over millions of years, that higher types of life were introduced, culminating at last in mankind. Moreover, the old idea that each species of plant or animal was originally brought into existence by a separate creative act, has yielded to the view of the development of entire groups of allied species from a common ancestor, the descendants of which, in an immensely prolonged series of generations, and under the influences of different surroundings, gradually became more and more divergent from each other, till they broke up into those distinctly marked groups which we call different species. So far as these modifications of the old conception of Creation go, they may be said not only to have become fairly established facts of science, but to have been generally acquiesced in by Christian theologians, as in no way inconsistent with religious ideas.

But it is plain that the idea of development which is presented by those modifications of the

earlier belief might be carried much further. If different species may be traced back to a common ancestor of the genus which contains them, why not go back further still, and imagine a common ancestor of the different genera themselves? Nay, why not carry on the simplification step by step through the ages of the Past, till all life, both animal and vegetable, is traced back to a common origin in some rudimentary primeval form, from which every living creature has descended? And having got back to that imaginary parental form, why not conceive that even that was not produced by a direct creative act, but sprang naturally out of the ferment of the elements at the moment when our globe had cooled down sufficiently to furnish it with a fitting abode? For speculative minds a bold generalisation of this kind possesses a peculiar seductiveness, because of the unity of origin and order to which it reduces all the complex phenomena of existence; and if the account of the universe thus suggested could be accepted, it would present an unbroken course of growth, under the operation of natural forces, from the primordial vapour-cloud to the present condition of our world and its occupants.

It is thus that the great theory of Evolution has been constructed. Given the atoms of the

original vapour to start from, it derives from their mutual interactions all the forms through which the universe has passed in reaching its present state. According to it, the entire unfolding of existence has proceeded continuously by natural laws, and no interference from without has been needed to introduce new elements or make fresh starts. Everything was contained in the vapour potentially, and out of the vapour everything has grown of itself. Nothing, obviously, can be simpler, nothing grander in its simplicity, than this theory of Evolution; but whether it is more than a splendid dream of the imagination, time and research alone can show. Our only concern with it now is confined to the points at which it comes into contact with religious belief; and those points are only two, the origination of the primordial vapour-cloud, and the origination of man.

As to the former, it is clear that the theory does not really account for anything. It assumes the existence, in the beginning, of atoms so endowed with permanent forces, and so disposed in space, as to be able by their self-originated movements to produce all the successive forms through which the universe has passed. Whence those atoms came, with their marvellous capabilities and forces, it does not profess to tell us; that to

it is the insoluble enigma of existence. In fact, it is only a process, a method of action, a law of growth, which the theory sketches out; concerning the origin, the force, the agent or moving cause of the whole development, it has nothing to say. But if we supply the omission, and ascribe the atoms, with their forces and disposition, to the creative, energising will of an eternal, omnipresent, almighty, all-wise God, then the demands of religion are satisfied; then the gradual evolution of the universe, supposing it to be a fact, will simply exhibit the mode in which it has pleased God to work. Given God as the Author and Agent, with the idea of Evolution religion has no quarrel. Nor in the bold, and as yet wholly unverified, notion that the ancestral germs of all terrestrial life were spontaneously engendered by the ferment of matter, under some favourable conditions, does religion find anything to protest against, provided it be allowed that if matter possessed that potency, it had it from God; for in that case life will have proceeded from Him, just as much as if He had directly created it without the intervention of His creature, matter. In a word, from the original vapour-cloud down to the appearance of man on the scene, religion has nothing to say against the endeavours of science to establish the theory

of Evolution, if only God be confessed as the Originator and energising Power of the entire process.

It is when we reach the last step in the great drama of development, the introduction of man upon the scene, that the theory appears to come into disturbing and threatening contact with religion. The thoroughgoing evolutionist, who admits of no interference with the order of Nature, no breach of continuity or entrance of a new element of being, views man as simply a natural growth out of the preceding state of things, one more stage onwards in the self-unfolding process. As, in his theory, the primitive germ-cell gradually passed into a mollusc, the mollusc into a reptile, the reptile into a mammal, so the mammal, having in one line of its development assumed an ape-like form, by degrees became a man. Man, then, according to this view, is only the most advanced of the animals, the last link as yet in the chain of animal life, differing from the creatures below him in the fuller cultivation or ripening of his faculties, but not in the essence of his being, not in the type or character of his nature. It is against this doctrine about human nature that religion must protest, as striking fatally at the teaching of the Bible, that man was made in the

image of God, and possesses a spiritual nature, and is capable of immortality.

Now what I wish to point out is this: that the theory of Evolution, though pushed to this extreme conclusion by the materialist, does not really contain it, or necessarily lead up to it. The conclusion is foisted on the theory by an assumption which is illegitimate, and of which physical science is by its very nature incapable of affording a justification. To understand this, it is essential to notice how far the theory, supposing it to be scientifically established, can carry us in our endeavour to discover what human nature is. It is obvious that in one part of his constitution man is closely related to the animal world. His body is composed of the same elementary substances as theirs, and he resembles the superior animals in his general structure, and in the appetites and instincts in which his physical life is manifested. In fact, if we looked at man in his bodily aspect alone, leaving out his reason, his moral sense, his religious sentiment, everything, in a word, which is peculiarly and characteristically human, then, it is simply as an animal that he would appear to us, and the utmost distinction which we could reasonably make in his favour would be to place him in a genus by himself at the summit of the animal world. Sup-

pose, now, that the theory of Evolution were proved; that we were compelled by facts to acknowledge that the higher forms of animal life have been naturally developed out of the lower, and that the development when it had reached the ape-like form did not stop there, but still went on and produced the human form, so that the corporeal structure and physical attributes of man are the last step in the ascending series; supposing this were all proved by physical research, how far should we have got in our endeavour to ascertain what man really is? Clearly, just as far as we were before, and not a step further; we should have found out, what we already knew, that on one side of his nature, the side of his corporeal, physical life, man may be ranked among the animals. Between this view and the older one the difference is merely one of method. Whereas, before, we imagined man's body to have been made for him directly out of the dust of the earth, now we should imagine a body, in all respects the same, to have been gradually developed for him out of preceding inferior forms of life. The process is different, just as making anything by machinery differs from making it by hand; but the result arrived at is the same; it is the human body, with its animal appetites and instincts. What may have

been added afterwards, to complete human nature and constitute man himself in the fulness of his being, is another matter altogether, about which physical science is incapable of affording any information. When Evolution has given us man's physical part, it has done all that it can; there it stops, and is silent. If, on other grounds, we can hold it probable that into the living human body, when formed either by creation or development, it matters not which, God was pleased to breathe a spiritual element, or faculty, or personality, by virtue of which man became a spiritual, immortal being, made in the image of God, Evolution has nothing to urge against this view, any more than in its favour; the whole question lies entirely beyond its range. To deduce from the theory the animal character of man's body is legitimate enough, and to that the only thing to be said is that we were perfectly aware of it before; but to go on, as the materialist does, to assert that the theory proves the body to be the whole man, to the exclusion of any spiritual element, is simply to enter the region of illogical and baseless assumption. A physical theory can deal with nothing which is not contained within the limits of the physical world; the spiritual world, if there be one, lies entirely beyond its scope.

The turning point of the whole contention can-

not be too strongly insisted upon; and it is this, that when the great theory of Evolution, supposing it to be accepted, has shown how man's corporeal structure was fashioned by slow development through a long series of ascending animal forms, it has shown all that it is capable of showing about man. It has accounted for his body, and his bodily life, but for no more. If we go on to ask, Is the body the whole man? Is the bodily life his whole life? it has no answer to make; that part of the enquiry into human nature belongs to a region into which the physical sciences, even with the help of Evolution, are unable to penetrate.

No doubt there is a temptation to many minds to make an illogical leap beyond the real boundary of the theory, and for the sake of simplicity and unity of system to draw within it everything which is embraced by human experience. If Evolution accounts for so much, say these, why not allow it to account for all? If it traces the structure and the instincts of the human body to an animal ancestry, why not all the human faculties as well,—why not reason, conscience, will, religious sentiment? Why, when up to this point everything has gone on so smoothly without the least break of continuity, introduce here a new start, a supernatural interference, a fresh creation?

Why not? Simply because we cannot, without denying the whole testimony of our consciousness to what we are. The moment we emancipate ourselves from thraldom to a theory, and try freely to realise in thought what we are, the conviction seizes us irresistibly that we are more, far more, than our bodies with their animal, instinctive life. What is there in common between such bodies and a self-conscious human personality, endowed with moral and spiritual affections? "When I think of myself," it has been well said by a profound writer, "the conviction that *I* am a different being from any part, or the whole, of my solid material frame, forces itself upon me with an overpowering weight which I cannot resist; I cannot think of any single organ, of any one sense, or of all of them together, as being myself. My consciousness, my understanding, my will, everything that comes under that great head of *I*, constitute a spiritual unity which does not touch, which is divided whole worlds from, my corporate structure. I know, I perceive, that *I* and matter are distinct ideas. Can we conceive any greater and more absolute diversity than that between a personal consciousness, involving the highest moral, the subtlest intellectual perceptions, on the one hand, and a structure of organs, stomach, heart, liver,

muscles, tendons, sinews, arteries, veins, on the other?"[1] It is this consciousness of possessing a spiritual element of being, which cannot be identified with any of the products of physical development, that compels us to limit Evolution to its proper sphere, and to refuse the suggestion to extend it, on the plea of simplicity or unity, to the entire constituents of human nature.

There can scarcely, indeed, be a more flagrant instance of a faulty method of investigation, than the attempt to determine what man actually is by tracing the physical history of the world. The very thing that we want to discover is, whether he is embraced within that history,—that is, whether he is a mere product of physical development. Till that is ascertained, the history is irrelevant, and leads to no conclusion concerning him. To find out what he is, instead of having recourse to a story which may or may not concern him, we must examine himself; we must take the living man in his fully developed humanity, with all his powers and faculties in proper action, and see what manner of being he is. And this we can do more effectually than we can examine anything else whatever, by means of that self-consciousness which is the inalienable attribute of hu-

[1] Mozley, "Essay on Design."

manity. Each one of us can do it for himself by careful introspection; and if in some cases there may be differences of result, owing to eccentric or imperfect developments of the constitution, we have access to the general experience of mankind to correct anything which is abnormal or peculiar to the individual. By thus carefully looking into ourselves, observing other men, and verifying our observations by the normal convictions of the more developed and cultured portions of mankind, we learn that we are persons, not things,—rational, moral, responsible, spiritual agents, not animals moved by mere instincts and appetites,—beings who can will and choose, practise virtue, resist temptation, know and worship and serve God, as the Father whose children we are, and project our hopes into the eternal future. This is what man is testified to be by the general consciousness and experience of the race; and this therefore we are bound to believe that man really is, because than that general consciousness and experience there is no surer basis of knowledge. And when we have ascertained this to be the true account of our nature, it seems superfluous to ask for any further proof of our essential difference from all other terrestrial creatures. It is enough to place the animal beside the man, and point to the contrast.

Let common sense be the arbiter of the dispute. Look, I would say, at the ways of any community of animals, however curious their instincts and habits may be; at bees in a hive, for instance, or ants in a nest, or hounds in a pack. Then look at a Christian congregation, gathered together to worship the unseen, eternal God, bowing their hearts before His infinite majesty, seeking pardon and peace and spiritual strength, hymning the praises of His great name, offering themselves as living sacrifices to Him in grateful devotion and joy. Is it fairly possible to believe that there is no difference of kind here, but only of degree, and that the worshippers of the invisible Father are merely animals of somewhat more developed instincts than the others? Single out whatever in the lower ranks of creation may seem to have developed itself the most in the line of approach to mankind, say the ape with its curious mimicry, or the domestic dog, which still remains a dog in spite of thousands of years of human companionship; and try if you can persuade yourself that these can be justly classed in the same order of being as the astronomer measuring the heavens, the philosopher discussing the enigmas of life, the philanthropist sacrificing imself for the alleviation of suffering, the

penitent humbling his soul before the eye of God, the martyr sealing his faith with his life's blood, the saint breathing forth his spirit in a rapture of faith, hope, and love. Do not your reason, your self-consciousness, your irresistible conviction of what human nature is, rise up in the face of such comparisons to protest against classing brute beasts with men, and men with brute beasts, as being all of one nature and kind? Are you not compelled to draw an essential distinction, and to believe that, whatever animals may be,—whether or not it be a fact that with them order sprang from order, the higher from the lower, in a constantly ascending series, by natural causation,—and whether or not man's physical system was produced by like means, as the last term of the series,—yet in human nature as we know it, in its personality, will, reason, moral and spiritual faculties, we come upon a break of continuity, a new element, a being essentially different and incomparably higher, and which cannot be better explained than by the ancient statement, "In the day that God created man, in the image of God made He him?"

This answer of common sense is decisive. The question is not one of elaborate and difficult science, but of everybody's consciousness and

self-knowledge. Those who honestly desire to know what their dignity and calling as human beings are, need not sweep the heavens with the telescope to discover how worlds were made, nor explore the rocks to find out the succession of living creatures, nor investigate the anatomical resemblance between the bodies of the man and the ape; it will be enough to look within themselves, and listen to the inward voice which witnesses to their filial relation to God, and to their capacity for truth and goodness, for divine fellowship and peace. And as they listen, let them follow and obey, for thus will knowledge pass into realised experience. As they cultivate their spiritual faculties, endeavour to grow in purity and unselfishness, and walk before God as His children in the aims and duties of a righteous life, the inward witness of their spiritual nature and divine lineage will grow stronger and clearer, and no voices of pretended science will ever be able to shake their hope of eternal life. "Now are we the sons of God," they will be able to say with the Apostle, "and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."[2]

[2] 1 John iii. 2.

IV.

THE RELATION OF MIRACLES TO FAITH IN CHRIST.

"Many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them."—JOHN ii. 23, 24.

THE plain meaning of this passage is, that our Lord was dissatisfied with that kind of belief in Him which was founded on His miracles. The persons of whom it speaks paid little attention to His teaching; His words of grace, His appeals to the spiritual consciousness, His witness to the Father in heaven, fell in vain on their ears, and stirred no depths in their hearts. But when they saw Him do wonderful acts which were beyond the power of other men, they were aroused and attracted. Here, they said, are the marks of a Divine commission; these are supernatural credentials; a man who can do such deeds must be a messenger from God. This sort of acceptance and adherence did not please our Lord. He did not wish to be believed in merely because of His miracles. He would not trust those

who followed Him only because they saw His acts of power; He would not commit Himself to them, for beneath this belief of the head He saw a careless, indifferent heart, which made no response to His word. Hence, when one of the most distinguished of these believers came to Him, saying, "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him," he met with a rebuff: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[1] It was as much as to say, "Never mind the miracles; to begin with them is to begin at the wrong end; to believe because of them is not to believe to any saving purpose; the real need, the essential condition of entering into the kingdom of God, is a birth of the Spirit, a quickening of the soul with a new life, by which it will become responsive to the truth, and enter into filial relations with the Father in heaven."

Now there is a serious difference between this disparagement of miracles as a foundation of faith in Christ, and the prominent position often assigned to them in treatises written in defence of Christianity. In many such treatises miracles are represented as being the essential basis of

[1] John iii. 2, 3.

belief in Christ, the necessary credentials of all revelation from God. The view is maintained, that however good and self-approving to the heart and conscience any teaching might be, yet so long as it remained mere teaching, and unattended by external, physical attestation of a supernatural kind, we could not have any satisfactory assurance of its right to claim our acceptance. But let the teacher perform some visible miracle in proof of his right to demand belief, and the case is immediately altered; here is the supernatural attestation which was wanting before; here the divine seal to the truth of his words. It is clear that in this way of putting the matter, the burden of proof is laid on the miracle; whereas, on the contrary, our Lord puts aside the miracle, distrusts the belief which is based upon it, and claims acceptance for His word on the ground of its intrinsic, self-evidencing truth. "Every one that is of the truth," He said, "heareth My voice;"[2] and again, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."[3]

In the present conflicts respecting the claim of Christianity to be of Divine origin and authority, the divergence of views here pointed out is of sufficient importance to deserve very careful

[2] John xviii. 37. [3] John viii. 47.

attention. I propose, accordingly, to draw out what the teaching of the New Testament about miracles really is, and to deduce from it their right place in the scheme of Christian evidences.

I. Let us begin by going back to the mission of our Lord's great forerunner, John the Baptist. He came forth as a preacher of righteousness; warning, exhorting, convincing of sin, with a power which penetrated the consciences of multitudes, and brought them to his baptism of repentance in token of their earnest preparation for the Messiah. "He was a burning and a shining light,"[4] and "all held John as a prophet."[5] Yet "John did no miracle;"[6] his mission neither had, nor needed, supernatural attestation by visible miracles; his word reached the heart by its own intrinsic force, and the heart sprang forth in answer to it, and confessed him to be the prophet of God.

After the same manner our Lord Himself began His public ministry. He called sinners to repentance, and declared to them the good news of the kingdom of heaven. Words of power and grace flowed from His lips, awakening hope, imparting light, bringing rest to weary souls. He spoke of the heavenly Father, and wherever there was a filial spirit, it responded to the call,

[4] John v. 35. [5] Matt. xxi. 26. [6] John x. 41.

and believed. It was thus that, before He had performed a single miracle, He had gathered round Him faithful disciples, such as the sons of Zebedee, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and others, who said, "We have found the Messias,"[7] and trusted their souls to His guidance.

Then, indeed, the Gospel narratives tell us that miracles followed, and were done by Him profusely all over the land, drawing multitudes to see them, and filling all minds with wonder. But let us notice of what kind these miracles were. There were no startling prodigies among them, of which the only feature was the astounding marvellousness; such things are found only in the false and foolish legends of the apocryphal gospels. The miracles of our genuine Gospels were, one and all, expressive signs, full of divinest meaning; acted parables, significant of spiritual truths; wonders of mercy and grace, attesting a Redeemer's presence, and kindling a hope of deliverance from those powers of evil into bondage to which mankind had fallen. These supernatural acts are described by several names in the Gospels,—names signifying respectively wonders, signs, and powers, but too often indiscriminately rendered *miracles* in our English Bible; of these the one which is least often and

[7] John i. 41.

least conspicuously employed is that which signifies a wonder or prodigy. For the most part they are called signs or powers,—names of the highest import, as teaching us to lay stress on the moral and spiritual aspect of the miracles, rather than on their mere miraculousness. Signs they were of grace, illustrations of redeeming power, tokens of the kingdom manifested in the midst of the world, that men entering into it might find deliverance from evil, and receive the pure heart, the renewed will, the strength for duty, the hope and joy in God, which become the reconciled children of the Father in heaven.

Look at the record, and see what kind of miracles the Saviour scattered along His path. Nearly all were acts of healing. To the lame, soundness of limb; to the deaf, hearing; to the dumb, speech; to the blind, sight; to the sick, health; to the possessed by the devil, deliverance; to the dead, life: such were the Saviour's gifts. What could more strikingly illustrate His redeeming office? He came to bring men out of the slavery of sin and the shadow of death into the freedom and light of the children of God; what more fitting than that the outward tokens of man's bondage and darkness, such as infirmities, diseases, and mortality, should vanish before His life-giving presence? Even of the few

of our Lord's miracles which belonged to a different class, the significance was no less clear and spiritual. Wine to cheer the marriage-feast, bread to feed the hungry multitudes, a draught of fishes to fill the empty nets of His disciples, the stilling of the threatening storm, the walking on the restless, devouring sea, even the cursing of the barren fig-tree,—such gifts and such acts were more expressive than sermons, and to the hearing ear and instructed eye spoke of sympathy and help, of the subservience of Nature to the wants of God's children, and of the need to beware of final impenitence and unprofitableness. It is no mere play of fancy thus to interpret the miracles of the Lord Jesus. He interprets them Himself for us. He feeds the multitude, and says, "I am the bread of life."[8] He opens the blind eyes, and says, "I am the light of the world."[9] He sets free the palsied from his living prison, and says, "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."[1] He casts out devils, and says, "The kingdom of God is come unto you."[2] He calls the dead out of the grave, and says, "I am the resurrection and the life."[3] Not one of the whole amazing series was a mere prodigy, or unmeaning display of superhuman

[8] John vi. 35. [9] John ix. 5. [1] Matt. ix. 6.
[2] Matt. xii. 28. [3] John xi. 25.

power; not one was performed in answer to a demand for logical proof of a Divine mission. They were "works," of which the miraculousness was but one feature, and not even the chief feature; gracious works, Messianic works, works which answered to the prophetic anticipations of the kingdom of God, and attested the presence of the promised "grace and truth." They dropped from the Saviour's hands like a natural effluence of grace from His person, seconding His words of mercy and consolation, and testifying of the redeeming power which dwelt in Him for the healing, not of the body alone, but of the souls which had wandered from God, and by the powers of Evil had been wounded and despoiled.

Working such miracles, our Lord preached the Gospel of the Kingdom up and down the land, and with different results in different places and among diverse classes of people. What we have now to do is to observe the connection which these different results had with His displays of miraculous power.

First, it must occur to us that if miracles were the true basis of faith in Him, then we should be entitled to expect that where most miracles had been wrought, most faith would have been produced. But in reality it was precisely the reverse: the most miracles, the least faith!

"Then began He," says the Evangelist, "to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not."[4] Miracles, clearly, had no efficacy in themselves to beget that faith which subdues the heart to the obedience of Christ. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are witnesses for ever, that mere exhibitions of superhuman power can bring no contrite souls to the Redeemer's feet.

Next, we read of some upon whom, although they found no divine, self-evidencing quality in our Lord's teaching, His miracles wrought so far as to convince them that He was a prophet sent from God, and invested with a supernatural authority to teach. Well, we might have thought, this was a long step towards the faith which He wished to call forth; but again we should have been wrong. This belief, founded solely on the miraculousness of the miracles, was exactly, as we have already seen, what our Lord distrusted and rebuked. It is indeed written of Him, that He would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; and if this conviction, based only on the wonders wrought by Him, had been the first step in the right direction, the earliest dawn of the spiritual life, we are sure that our Lord would have tenderly en-

[4] Matt. xi. 20.

couraged and helped it. But no! He was stern to it, He repelled it. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."[5] When the multitude, at the sight of a miracle cried, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world,"[6] He turned away from them and hid Himself. Adherents won by miracles alone were not to His mind.

Then, again, there were others who were ready, so they thought, to believe, if sufficiently strong miraculous attestation were given to the claims of the Lord Jesus, but who desired something more decisive than His ordinary miracles. These were not large enough, nor striking enough, to satisfy them; acts more prodigious, more startling, were what they wanted. Well, we might have said, why not help them over their difficulty? To fill the sky with flashing portents, or to roll back the sun in its course, would have been as easy to omnipotence as to cure sickness with a word; and if this was all that was needed to transform them into believing disciples, why not grant it, and thus lead these doubters into the way of salvation? So we might have reasoned, but once more we should have been mistaken. That was not the Lord's method. He cared not to overpower unbelief by the force of prodigies.

[5] John iv. 48. [6] John vi. 14.

When the multitude whom He had fed still asked, "What sign showest Thou then, that we may see, and believe Thee? what dost Thou work?"[7] no sign was given; the drawing to Him must be through the spirit: "Every man," replied our Lord, "that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Me." At another time, "the Pharisees with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven." "O ye hypocrites!" was His answer, "and He left them and departed."[8] So it was, again and again, during His ministry, even to the last, when once more the chief priests and elders demanded His credentials: "By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?" It would have been easy to silence their cavils by some astounding act of power,—easy, but profitless; the Lord's method was to convict them of hypocrisy by a counter-question, and then turn away, saying, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."[9] Belief built on prodigies was to Him not worth the winning.

But there were some who believed and clave to Christ; who left all and followed Him, gave Him their hearts, trusted Him with their souls, and felt sure that His words were "the words

[7] John vi. 30. [8] Matt. xvi. 1—4. [9] Matt. xxi. 23—27.

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[6] John vi. 14.

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of eternal life."[1] How was this true faith wrought? The Gospels do not supply us with a single instance in which it was based on the miracles as being, by the sole quality of miraculousness, logical proofs of our Lord's Divine mission. He spoke to the heart, and where the heart through grace was true and tender, it obeyed the call. Even before He had performed a single miracle, as we have seen, some were thus drawn to Him; and every notice of the way in which He obtained loyal followers points to the same spiritual process, the same winning of the heart by the penetrating force and attraction of His word. His miracles might indeed arouse attention at first, and bring listeners to the words of Him of whom it was said, "Never man spake like this man;"[2] and when faith had sprung up in the soul, it might be deepened and strengthened by seeing how redeeming grace flowed forth in those "works," those merciful acts of His hands, which were the predicted signs and seals of the Messiah's office. That it was so in the case of His first miracle, we are expressly told. He "manifested forth His glory, and His *disciples* believed on Him."[3] But in no case are we given to understand that the mere wonders produced the living faith; the process set before

[1] John vi. 68. [2] John vii. 46. [3] John ii. 11.

us is that of the truth finding the heart, and the heart yielding itself to the truth. Observe how our Lord puts the matter in His solemn thanksgiving to His Father: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes;"[4] and again, when He sets a little child in the midst, and says, "Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[5] How could babes and little children discern between the natural and the supernatural, or appraise the logical force of miracles? It was the childlike heart which responded to the appeal of the truth, and gave its faith to Him whom it felt to be the Truth and the Life. Observe, again, how the Lord describes those who yielded to His word the favourable reception which the good ground yields to the seed. Not as those who were convinced by the miracles that He must be a Teacher come from God, but as those who "in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."[6] Once more, observe how He distinguishes between His true followers, and the Jews who believed not: "Ye believe not, because ye are

[4] Matt. xi. 25. [5] Matt. xviii. 2, 3. [6] Luke viii. 15.

not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.[7]" Thus, when St. Peter made his great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," it was not to any sense of the evidential force of the miracles that our Lord traced back the conviction, but to the Father's spiritual action on his heart, enabling Him to perceive the divine glory of Jesus of Nazareth: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."[8]

Putting all these intimations together, we can scarcely help seeing how strongly the fact is brought out, that in our Lord's days acceptable faith in Him was not based on the supernatural attestation given to Him by His miracles, as bare miracles or prodigies, but on the truth and divineness of His word, penetrating and drawing to Him the prepared and seeking heart. But it might, perhaps, be urged that, although this was the case then, yet after His departure the Apostles made their converts by their appeal to the great cardinal miracle of the Resurrection. Let us briefly, therefore, examine what their appeal to that supernatural fact really was.

It is certainly true that in the Acts we read that the peculiar office of an Apostle was "to

[7] John x. 26, 27. [8] Matt. xvi. 16, 17.

be a witness of His resurrection;"[9] and that "with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."[1] In each early sermon which is recorded, and in each early conflict with the Jewish rulers, we find this a chief topic. At the first call of the Gentiles, St. Peter's discourse was based upon it; at Antioch, St. Paul and St. Barnabas proclaimed it both to Jew and Gentile; at Athens, St. Paul "preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."[2] But when we examine how the supernatural fact was used, we do not find that it was appealed to as a bare miracle which stamped a divine character on the pretensions of Jesus of Nazareth, and on the evidence for which the whole case rested. That may be the modern, but is far from being the Apostolic, use of our Lord's resurrection. Indeed, the Apostles never attempted to *prove* the fact at all by evidence or argument; they were content simply to affirm it. What they preached was a living, exalted, almighty Saviour, the Son of God, the Prince of life and Source of salvation; and they bade men yield to Him their trust and devotion. This living Saviour they identified with that Jesus who had gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God, "doing good, and healing all that

[9] Acts i. 22. [1] Acts iv. 33. [2] Acts xvii. 18.

were oppressed of the devil,"[3] and whom men had seen crucified, dead, and buried, but whom God, by raising Him from the dead, had attested to be His own Son;[4] and the connecting link between that crucified Jesus, and the Lord of life and salvation whom they set forth, was of necessity the fact of His resurrection. Let no one think,—so ran their testimony,—that the great Prophet who stirred the land with His doctrine and acts of grace is dead and gone; He lives, for the grave could not hold Him; God raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins; it is His power that is now present to save both body and soul, neither is there salvation in any other. That is how the Apostles preached the resurrection; not as a past miracle, on the proof of which by satisfactory evidence their case rested, but as a fact which sustained and harmonized their witness to the Lord Jesus, as the living, exalted Lord and Saviour of mankind, in accepting whom they would be delivered from the power of darkness, and become children of God, and heirs of eternal life.

II. Having observed the way in which the New Testament puts the Christian miracles before us, we have now to draw the conclusion to

[3] Acts x. 38. [4] Rom. i. 4.

which it points as to the position which they ought to occupy in our scheme of Christian evidence.

And, first, it seems clear that there is no warrant for putting the miracles in the forefront of our argument, as if they must be proved by incontrovertible evidence to have been really performed and strictly supernatural, before the Gospel itself, the substance of Christianity, can reasonably approve itself to our hearts as being from God. All that we have collected from the New Testament on the subject points to a different order: first, the various intrinsic and moral evidences of the divineness of the Gospel; and, after these, the attestation afforded by the physical miracles of its origin. Let us see how this order justifies itself.

The vital question for us and for all men is this: Has the heavenly Father revealed Himself to us in His Son Jesus Christ, claimed us in Him as His children, called us through Him to be partakers of His Spirit, opened to us by Him the gate of everlasting life? If this be true, then Christianity is of divine origin, the Church is the appointed witness for the doctrine of Christ, and the life to which it calls us is the way of salvation. But how shall we satisfy ourselves that the question may be rightly answered in the affirmative? Let us go to the

New Testament with humble, earnest hearts, not as critical philosophers, or curious students of ancient literature, but as persons who are acquainted with their own spiritual want and weakness, and are bent on finding, if possible, light and hope and strength. There the character of Christ stands before us absolutely unlike every other, unapproachable in its majesty, its goodness, its tenderness, its speaking witness that He is indeed the Father's Son. There His doctrine is set forth, piercing yet healing, as no other word ever was; finding us in our most secret thoughts, bringing us face to face with the awful presence of absolute purity; yet whispering peace, animating hope, leading us as trusting children to the Father's footstool. There we learn how this doctrine wrought in the world, at its first promulgation; how it seized with a strange power on weary hopeless souls, and was to them as life from the dead; how it gathered out of heathenism communities of the humble and pure, whose hope, founded on Christ, and whose life, lived after Christ, were like a new creation, rising out of the moral waste, bright, victorious, incorruptible. Then let us trace the history onwards, and see how, amidst all the disorders and passions of the world, and even of the Church, the character of Christ has remained the one flawless

model of human perfection; His doctrine of the relation of man to the heavenly Father the one spring of regeneration to society; the following in His steps the one path to the heights of unselfish, heroic service of God and man. Here is an accumulation of evidence, before the question of miracles is raised at all, sufficient to convince every earnest candid heart that the Lord Jesus did not speak of Himself, but as the Father gave Him commandment so He spoke and so He taught.[5]

In the next place, let us note of what importance it is that Christianity does find a sufficient support in this moral evidence, and is not staked on any independent, antecedent proof of the reality of the miracles historically connected with its origin. For it must be conceded, that if the contents of the Gospel, and the wonderful story of its achievements were put out of sight, and the question were raised whether the evidence which we now possess of the reality of the miracles by themselves, as isolated facts, would be sufficient to make them certain to our minds, the answer must be that the same amount of evidence would be insufficient to gain credence for any other alleged miraculous occurrences; and if so, then it cannot be sufficient by itself to convince the sceptic of the truth of the Chris-

[5] John xii. 49.

tian miracles. No one, I imagine, can have any doubt of this, who considers what a vast amount of evidence would be necessary to convince us of the truth of an alleged modern miracle. The very mention of such a thing would instantly excite our distrust, and raise suspicions of ignorance or imposture. We should demand a scientific investigation by impartial judges, a severe cross-examination of the witnesses, an exhaustive enquiry whether the phenomenon might not be accounted for by natural agencies. And, even if all this failed to detect a flaw in the evidence, our instinctive repugnance to admit a miracle would probably make most of us still withhold our belief, and deem it more likely that there was a mistake somewhere, or that some undetected natural cause had been at work, than that a superhuman power had really suspended or reversed the order of Nature. But it is certain that we are not in a position to apply such tests to the Christian miracles. Their date is more than eighteen centuries ago; they belonged to an unscientific age, unaccustomed to strict discrimination between the natural and the supernatural; the witnesses of them cannot be cross-examined; the four extant records of them were written many years after their alleged occurrence, and by persons

whom the sceptic pronounces us to be unable in any case to identify satisfactorily with eye-witnesses or even contemporaries. To rest the cause of Christianity, therefore, on the mere proof of these miracles as isolated facts, taken apart from the moral evidences which appeal to the awakened heart thirsting for truth and righteousness, would be to court failure, and betray the cause of the Gospel.

We come, then, to this conclusion, that to put the miracles before unbelievers in the forefront of our pleading for Christianity, and to say that they are bound to believe in the divine mission of Christ because it was supernaturally attested by these acts of superhuman power, is neither the way of the New Testament, nor the method of recommending the Gospel which is likely to be successful. The primary, the chief, appeal must be to the Gospel itself; to its adaptation to man's higher nature; to its self-evidencing quality when it comes in contact with the soul that seeks after God; to its spiritual power and beauty and glory; to its manifest effects on the course of the world, and on the order and growth [illegible] man society. Here are ample materials [illegible] answer to the question, "What think [illegible] rist?" But, if these fail to lead men [illegible] with the confession, "Thou art the

Son of God!" it will be lost labour to fall back on the miracles, and try by these to awake the cold torpid heart to faith in its Redeemer. In itself the miraculous is difficult of belief, difficult of proof; a thousand perplexities surround it, the critical intellect instinctively revolts against it. To secure it acceptance, it needs to be borne along on a mighty tide of moral evidence and fitness, to follow in the wake of manifested "grace and truth;" not as logical proof, but as pertinent illustration; not as bare prodigy, but as the physical embodiment and sign of the spiritual power which redeems and saves.[6]

Approach the Christian miracles in this way, and it will be strange if they continue any longer to be a stumblingblock to the understanding. Having believed in Christ for His own sake, you will find it easy to believe His miracles for His sake. When in Him you have recognised the Son whom the Father sent into the world, to "make us the children of God, and exalt us

[6] See Archbishop Trench, *Miracles*. "A miracle does not prove the truth of a doctrine, or the divine mission of Him that brings it to pass . . . The doctrine must first commend itself to the conscience as being *good*, and only then can the miracle seal it as *divine*. But the first appeal is from the doctrine to the conscience, to the moral nature in man . . . 'He that is of God heareth God's word,' and knows it for that which it proclaims itself to be . . . Where the mind and conscience witness against the doctrine, not all the miracles in the world have a right to demand submission to the word which they seal . . . It may be more truly said that we believe the miracles for Christ's sake, than Christ for the miracles' sake."

to everlasting life," and in your own spiritual experience have found deliverance, peace, and joy in following Him, it will surely seem to you no unaccountable thing that He should have done works such as no other man did, or should after His crucifixion have showed Himself to be the Lord of life by rising from the dead. Such wonders of mercy and grace will then appear to you the natural outcome of His redeeming mission, the appropriate signs and tokens of His saving might; and confirmations of the truth and reality of those ancient marvels will not be wanting in the every-day facts of the spiritual life. Is it not as wonderful that souls once sin-bound and corrupt should break off their chains and walk in newness of life, should face temptation with unconquerable firmness, should live above the world in the peace and hope, the purity and joy, of the children of God,—is not this as wonderful as that the sick should be healed and the dead raised by the word of the Son of God? And if "His name through faith in His name"[7] is still working these wonders in your own souls and in those of all His true-hearted servants, why should you find it difficult to believe that the same power gave "perfect soundness" to multitudes in the days of old?

[7] Acts iii. 16.

V.

PRAYER AND ITS DIFFICULTIES.

"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."—PHIL. iv. 6.

THIS passage expresses a universal rule of Christian practice. To pray, not now and then, or on great occasions only, but constantly, habitually, in regard to everything that bears on his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows, his trials, endeavours, and aspirations, is not merely a privilege permitted to the servant of Christ, but also a duty enjoined on him by the law under which he lives. Nothing can be more comprehensive than the words, "In everything let your requests be made known unto God."

Hence it may be said that prayer is to the spiritual life what breathing is to the natural life. The life cannot go on without it. "Pray without ceasing" is another of the Apostle's rules. That is, live in that spirit of looking to

God and depending on God, which is itself prayer, even when no word is spoken, no desire formed, and mind and hand are busy with the things of this world. Out of that spirit uttered prayer will ever be spontaneously ascending to God in heaven, laying all before Him, asking Him for every needful provision and help, and confiding every interest into His keeping.

This is the law and the practice of the Christian life. To the heart which trusts God, and has learnt to live to Him, prayer needs no justification. It justifies itself, just as breathing the air of heaven justifies itself. We breathe, and live; we pray, and live to God. Ceasing to breathe, we die; ceasing to pray, we die to God. Prayer is found by experience to be the condition of our spiritual life, and therefore to those who are spiritually alive it justifies itself.

Yet difficulties of the intellect have grown up around it, perplexing and chilling the hearts of many. Prayer is superfluous, we are told; prayer is impertinent; prayer is impotent; prayer is superstitious. Such are the hard things which are being said on many sides, and we cannot shut our ears to them. It seems, then, that prayer does need to be justified; not, indeed, for those who live by it, but for those who know not its efficacy and blessedness. Let us look at

it, then, for their sake, and examine what its justification is, and how the objections raised against it may be answered.

I. The justification of prayer may be said to rest on a single assumption,—that we have a heavenly Father who cares for us and invites our trust. Those who believe this cannot but pray; out of this faith prayer springs spontaneously, irrepressibly, and is sped heavenwards with the full impulse of reason, desire, and hope. For the children of God here on earth, conscious of frailty and want, and sure of having a gracious Father above, to abstain from prayer to Him, to lay none of their wants before Him, to confide none of their frailties into His bosom, to hope for no response from His goodness, would be nothing short of an acted contradiction, a denial in conduct of an accepted truth. Those who know God as their Father will and must pray.

If the assumption could be shown to be unfounded, then indeed there would be an end of prayer. It would at once become irrational, because useless. For the atheist prayer is absurd, for he knows of no one to hear him. For the pantheist prayer is equally absurd, for his God is simply the universe rolling on its fated way, which can neither hear, nor see, nor

feel. If we conceived of God as a First Cause who originated the framework of Nature, and then withdrew from superintending it, and left it to itself to run its course without any further care or guidance, again prayer would be irrational; for, from a God, who, after the first creative act, retired into everlasting inactivity, there would be nothing to expect. Or if we pourtrayed God as an intelligent Force, always sustaining and impelling the universe, but without moral qualities, incapable of affection or emotion, and acting continuously by an immutable necessity; then once more prayer would have no rational ground, because in the nature of things a response to it would not be possible. But the moment we pass beyond considering God as a mere Origin, or Cause, or Force, or Intelligence, and attribute to Him the paternal character with its appropriate affections and purposes; the moment we take as true the Psalmist's description, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him;"[1] then every spiritual instinct and impulse of our nature sends us to Him with our anxieties and wants, confident that He has an ear to hear us, a heart to feel for us, a hand ready to help and bless us.

[1] Psalm ciii. 13.

How inevitably the practice of prayer springs out of the belief in a God who cares for men, may be seen in the fact that never from the beginning has there been a prayerless religion. Look where we will among the historic religions, whether polytheistic or monotheistic, whether idolatrous or spiritual in their worship, in every one of them we find prayer enjoined and practised. In many of them, indeed, the idea of God was extremely imperfect, dimmed by a cloud of superstition, or degraded by much ignorance; yet it was never wholly destitute of that element out of which prayer naturally grows,—the belief that the Power above us in some degree cares for men, and is able to help them. The ancient Egyptians, Chaldæans, Assyrians, Persians prayed; the Greeks and the Romans prayed; Hindoos, Mahommedans, Buddhists, Parsees pray; even the rude African prays to his fetish. With very imperfect prayers, it may be; with prayers carnal, selfish, unworthy, and down to the low level of their own uncultured hearts; but still they pray, for they believe that the Power above them, little as they comprehend it, can hear and succour them. And in proportion as the conception of God rose to higher levels, we find that prayer rose also, and became more worthy of God, more spiritual, earnest, and fre-

quent. In ancient Judaism it grew with the divinely-inspired growth of the religion, pouring itself forth in private devotion and choral psalmody, in ever-increasing volume and purer utterance, until every town and village of Palestine possessed its sacred house for congregational prayer. In Christianity it has attained its maturity and climax, because here the revelation of God is at the highest; to the universal Father, made manifest by His Son, the whole Church unceasingly pours forth "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." From first to last a prayerless religion has been unknown upon earth.

Now this historical fact is of the highest importance to the justification of prayer. It removes the practice from the dubious ground of argument, and places it on the broad basis of a universal instinct or intuition of mankind. What men in general, of all times, countries, and classes, have felt to be true,—dimly, perhaps, in earlier generations and in low degrees of culture, but with a conviction continually deepened and widened by the growth of that rational and spiritual element which is their most essential human characteristic,—these are the surest of all truths, and, indeed, underlie the whole fabric of human knowledge and belief. For on the basis of practically universal intuition all which we believe

must be found resting at last, when we seek its ultimate justification. The only final test of truth that we can have lies in its approval of itself to our faculties; that is, to the normal, healthily-developed faculties of our race. Even revelation itself may not be excepted from this statement, for we have no other means of judging of the origin and authority of any propounded revelation than the faculties with which our nature is endowed; and, unless it approves itself to these, we cannot believe it to be from God.[2] Indeed, it is only through the verdict of these faculties that we can know that there is a God to make a revelation to us, or can be convinced that truthfulness is one of His attributes, and that the word which comes from Him is entitled to our trust. Hence, the ultimate ground of all belief must be found in ourselves; and whatever sentiment or practice rests most directly and completely on the general intuitive conviction of mankind, and continues to approve itself to them as they advance in human culture, has the strongest of all justifications which are possible in the nature of things. Such a justification belongs both to that conception of God of which prayer is the offspring, and to

[2] "Reason," says Bishop Butler, "is the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself." (*Analogy*), Part II. ch. iii.

prayer itself; and thus the practice of praying to God stands on a basis which is firmer than logical proof, and secure against all the shocks of the critical intellect.

It is, further, to be noticed that the character of prayer is defined and limited by the fact which justifies it. For to say that we come to God with our petitions because we believe Him to be our Father, is the same as to say that we come to Him because we feel ourselves to be His children. It is, then, the children's prayer which is justifiable prayer. But the children ought to trust in the Father's wisdom and goodness, to submit to the Father's will, and to be in harmony with the Father's mind. Hence arise three qualifications of prayer, which are necessary to its justification,—trust, submission, harmony with the mind of God; and each of these, accordingly, is prescribed in Scripture to regulate Christian prayer. *Trust:* for we are to "ask in faith;"[3] to "believe when we pray;"[4] to argue from our own parental feelings to God's,—"how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"[5] *Submission:* for Christ's prayer is our pattern; "Not My will but Thine be done?"[6] *Harmony with the mind*

[3] James i. 6. [4] Mark xi. 24. [5] Matt. vii. 11.
[6] Luke xxii. 42.

of God: for "if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us."[7] It is to prayer framed in this spirit that the promises of the Gospel belong; these are the conditions which evidently underlie all the wonderful sayings of the Bible about the efficacy of prayer. But it is not merely on the authority of the Bible that these limitations of acceptable prayer rest; they have their foundations in the same intuitions of the spiritual consciousness on which our belief in God is based. Even had it been announced to us, on authority which claimed for itself the divine sanction, that suspicious hearts could by entreaty force God to give, or that rebellious hearts could bend His will to their own desires, or that hearts which craved improper things could snatch them from Him by importunity; it would have been impossible for us to believe any one of those things, for they would contradict those ultimate intuitions which lie at the root of our belief in God and revelation. A Being who could suffer Himself to be controlled by the petitions of the unfilial, the self-willed, or the impure, could in no sense be the God to whom our souls aspire.

Trust, submission, harmony with the divine will, are therefore essential conditions of acceptable, efficacious prayer; and the recognition of

[7] 1 John v. 14.

them is of the utmost importance to regulate our practice and expectations. They obviously exclude all trying of experiments on God, all praying which is used as a test whether He will give or refuse; for such prayer proceeds on a doubt of God, and is inconsistent with the filial spirit of trust. They equally exclude all peremptory, unconditional prayer, which demands the fulfilment of specific desires; for every petition of that kind offends against the rule of humble submission to God, and preference of His will to our own. And as they must necessarily exclude all prayers which are prompted by worldly and selfish desires, so also they cannot admit petitions for things which the order of Nature and Providence shows to be contrary to the divine mind. The Christian of a truly filial temper will certainly not demand of God the pleasures of sense or the gratifications of ambition; and as little will he ask for anything which involves a perceptible miracle, because he knows that such miracles are not now according to the Father's mind. So long, for instance, as the result of disease is doubtful, he will consider it permitted to him humbly to pray for a favourable termination, if it be God's will; but he will not ask that a manifestly incurable disease may be arrested, or an amputated limb

be restored, or his dead be given back, for in such cases he will understand that the will of God is already pronounced. In thus limiting prayer, and enclosing it within the sphere of filial trust, submission, and harmony with the mind of God, these conditions cut away all occasions for doubting whether God hears us or cares for us, because our specific petitions are not granted. For if the keynote of our prayers is always the desire that His will, not ours, should be done, they cannot fail to be answered, because His will, in all events, is sure to be done. If we repose unbounded trust in His wisdom and love, we shall be certain that the answer, in whatever shape it comes, will be the best that could be sent. If our hearts beat in unison with His mind, the manifestation of His mind by the result of our prayers will approve itself to us as good, and we shall have no inclination to complain. In a word, while we unreservedly offer up our own will to God in entire submission and trust, we shall both pray rightly, and find no difficulty in believing that our prayers are heard and answered. It is in the absence of the filial spirit that speculative difficulties compass prayer around, and tempt us to think it a vain and foolish thing; between the childlike heart and the Father in heaven

there is no room for doubts to intrude themselves.

II. Prayer, then, justifies itself to those who have a filial spirit towards God, for it springs spontaneously out of their deepest spiritual instincts, and is found by experience to be the condition of their life unto God. But we must now consider what the critical intellect has to urge against it.

1. And, first, we are told that prayer is an idle superfluity. God must be acquainted with everything, and needs not to be informed of what we feel and need; why then act as if He were ignorant, and pour into His ears a tedious catalogue of wants and sorrows? No doubt this would be an unanswerable argument against such prayer, if there be any such, as that which is offered for the purpose of informing God of our circumstances and desires; but then no Christian prayer is ever offered for that purpose. On the contrary, the Christian prays because he believes that all things are known to God; for if they were not, what assurance could suppliants enjoy that their petitions ever reached God's ear at all, or that He was cognizant of the thoughts and affections which impress on them an acceptable character? Far more reasonable would it be to invert the argument, and say,

If God did not know everything, what would be the use of praying? The just inference from God's knowledge is a very different one, and is drawn by our Lord: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."[8] God knows all, therefore use not vain repetitions,—that is our Lord's caution, to rid prayer of superstition; but to argue, God knows, therefore do not pray, is to misconceive the whole purpose of Christian prayer. A strange family it would be where the parent's knowledge put a fetter on the children's tongues, and thrust back their trusting confidences into a cold cheerless silence! Prayer is the communion of the child on earth with the Father in heaven, the unbosoming of the soul's wants and sorrows and joys into the sympathising ear of God, who invites its frankest trust, and would have it tell all to Him, although He sees it through and through, and is acquainted with every pang that wrings it, and every emotion that thrills its depths.

2. But prayer, we are further told, is worse than an idle superfluity,—it is an impertinent

[8] Matt. vi. 7, 8.

intrusion; for it is an attempt to bend the will of God to our will, to make Him swerve from the course which His perfect wisdom prescribes, and suit His actions to our private inclinations. How can any sensible, right-minded person be guilty of such effrontery? it is triumphantly asked. If your desires were right, and deserved to be granted, surely God, who always does right, would grant them without your asking Him. It is only when they are wrong that there is occasion for entreaty; and ought you not in that case to be ashamed of trying to persuade God into yielding to them, or of deeming Him capable of being overcome by your importunity?

Now, it may be freely allowed that this objection is valid against all self-willed, unfilial prayers; against all prayers which simply aim at getting as much as possible from God for selfish gratification, and are qualified by no loving trust or humble submission to His will; in a word, against all prayers which lie outside the limiting conditions already mentioned. Such prayers *are* an impertinent intrusion on the most high and holy God. But, before the objection can be accepted as valid against the prayers which proceed from a filial spirit, the whole conception of God on which religion is based must be shown to be fundamentally false. Let the objector prove to

us that we ought to dismiss every thought which pourtrays God as gracious, sympathising, caring for us, and loving us; and that for the Father in heaven, to whom we have been accustomed to look up, we ought to substitute some incomprehensible Abstraction dwelling in imperturbable serenity, without affection or emotion, unmoved alike by the clang of the whirling universe and the cries of the souls who seek His face; and then indeed we shall be chilled back into silence, and prayer will die away on our lips. Such an idea of God, however, has never yet been accepted by the heart of man; it may suit philosophical speculation, but every religion repudiates it, and most of all the religion of Christ, in whom God is especially manifested as the Father. The noblest elements in human nature have always supplied the materials wherewith to fashion our mental images of God; and so far from man being at the highest when most lifted above the possibility of emotion, the universal verdict pronounces a feeling, sympathising, compassionate heart to be essential to his moral excellence. Who ever drew the ideal portrait of a father, and pictured him destitute of tenderness for his children, or of delight in their confidences, or of desire that they should freely pour out their hearts to him? And if an emotionless

father would be a monster, what pretence can there be for framing God on that unlovely type, and bidding us crush our hearts into dumb misery before Him, because, plead as we might, He has no heart that can be touched? It may, indeed, be difficult, or even impossible, for us intellectually to combine the full flow of loving affection and sympathising emotion with the eternal, unchangeable perfection of the Godhead: but that is our infirmity; our weak understandings have no right to assume themselves able to measure God. It is under the guidance of our moral faculties that we form, and must form, our conception of Him who made us what we are; and these will ever recoil from the idea of a perfection which excludes all emotion and sympathy, and will cling to the God who says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."[9] The God of our hearts can never be the cold, passionless abstraction of philosophy; He will ever be the loving Friend and Helper who said of old, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people, and have heard their cry; for I know their sorrows, and am come down to deliver them."[1] To the ears of such a God no humble cry of His chil-

[9] Ps. L. 15. [1] Exod. iii. 7, 8.

dren can possibly be unacceptable, much less an impertinent intrusion.

3. Then, again, we are told that prayer is impotent; it seeks the unattainable; it demands a result which is opposed to the whole order and course of the universe. When you pray, says the objector, you ask God to bring about for you something which would not otherwise happen; to change by His direct interference the regular sequence of events; in plain words, to work a miracle on your behalf. For the essence of a miracle is the divine interference to change the natural order of events; the introduction of a divine volition into the series, so as to produce a result which without it would not have occurred; and it is no less than this which you demand every time that you put up a petition to God for anything. Is not the bare statement of your expectation sufficient to condemn it? Can it be possible that the majestic universe is ruled in this fitful way, by arbitrary, miraculous interferences, at every demand of myriads of ignorant, selfish petitioners? Is not such a conception inconsistent alike with our experience of the uniformity of Nature, and our belief in the perfect wisdom and unchanging purpose of God?

It is to be observed that this objection, which in terms seems limited to prayers for temporal

blessings, really extends also to prayers for spiritual benefits. For in the latter case, as much as in the former, we ask God to interfere and change in our favour the ordinary sequence of events. There is a mental order as well as a physical; there are moral laws as well as laws of Nature. If we ask God to remove a disease, to ward off a pestilence, or to cause a famine to cease, we pray for His interference with the physical order; if we ask Him to deliver us from a sinful habit, or to make us strong for duty, we pray for His interference with the mental or moral order. Hence, if the true conception of order and law is adverse to prayer at all, it must condemn prayer for spiritual as well as for temporal blessings.

Looking now into the heart of the difficulty here urged upon us, we perceive that it takes for granted that we know the manner in which God rules the universe, and are able to decide that it leaves no room for the efficacy of prayer. Yet it is certain that this knowledge is not possessed by us, but is far above our reach. So little do we understand of the Force which sustains and propels the vast mechanism of Being, that we are in utter ignorance of the real connection between even the simplest events which present themselves to our minds in the relation

of cause and effect. It is not conceivable that the universe should be an automatic system, evolving itself by a uniform necessary tendency, and that the introduction into it of a divine volition should be an exceptional interference with its order; on the contrary, the mainspring of the whole movement cannot be imagined to be other than the divine Energy ceaselessly applied by the divine Will. In everything God must be acting,—in every link of every chain of causes; so that the whole of the phenomena of the universe are, in some mysterious way, the effects of His will. And as to the lines or rules of His action, we have no means of knowing that they are limited to those broad uniformities which we call Laws of Nature; for the network of causation is so complex and far-reaching, as to present countless points at which it may be otherwise influenced by the divine purpose, without any possibility of detection by us. To affirm, therefore, that prayer must be powerless, because it requires interferences which are precluded by the uniformity of Nature, is to assume a knowledge which we certainly do not possess.

In truth, it may be confidently said, that to approach the question of prayer from the side of physical law cannot possibly lead to any satisfactory conclusion. The matter is one which

lies within an entirely different sphere of divine action. God is the Father of our spirits, and must rule us in accordance with moral laws. It is inconceivable that He should act towards us with a rigid uniformity, whether we be proud or humble, rebellious or penitent; whether we pray to Him in filial trust, or preserve a distrustful silence, or turn our backs upon Him in scornful ingratitude. Sooner might we expect the sun to fall from the sky, or worlds to hurtle together in ruinous shock, than the cry of the childlike heart to the Father in heaven to meet with no response of grace and help. Unless the moral government of the universe be a counterfeit and a mockery, true prayer must reach the ear of God, and must win a blessing from His love. And whatever divine action is necessary to produce that result must be in accordance with the highest law of existence. How the result may be brought about, by what laws of the divine purpose, or by what secret influences on mind or on matter, may be utterly unknown to us, and does not concern us; what really is of the deepest importance to us is the fact which rests for its certainty on the divine character, that in His own way and according to His own perfect wisdom and goodness God does accept and answer every genuine prayer which is breathed

to Him from the hearts of His own children. The question of the efficacy of prayer is not one on which any helpful light can be thrown by drawing distinctions between the natural and the supernatural, or puzzling out reconciliations between miracles and laws of Nature; it is shut up within the everlasting righteousness of God, and His faithfulness in making all things work together for good to them that love Him.

4. Once more, we are told that prayer is proved by experience to be a vain superstition; for as a matter of observable and registered fact it is not found to have any results, or to make any difference in the course of events. To show this an appeal is made to statistics. In Christian States, for instance, there are no persons so continuously and generally prayed for as monarchs, both that they may live long, and be endued with true religion and virtue; yet it has never appeared that their lives are prolonged beyond the average, or are conspicuous for any moral superiority. Again, the children of religious parents enjoy the privilege of being prayed for more than the children of the worldly and unbelieving; yet they are not found to be more free from the sicknesses and accidents of childhood, or to be longer lived or more prosperous. Pious soldiers enjoy no exemption from the casualties of battle; pray-

ing farmers are not observed to have finer weather or heavier crops, nor devout merchants better markets, than their prayerless neighbours. Missionary ships are probably wafted on their voyages of mercy with more prayers than others, yet they show as large a percentage of wrecks. In fact, adds the objector, with a last thrust at the practice of prayer, Christians themselves, however they may keep up the form of praying, practically evince their disbelief in its efficacy as far as temporal matters are concerned, by their adoption of the sentiment, that adversity, not prosperity, is the blessing of Christianity.

For the sincere Christian, who has drunk into his Master's spirit, it is difficult to treat such an argument as this with seriousness; for him prayer is too spiritual a thing to have its efficacy submitted to mechanical or numerical tests. Trusting, affectionate children are not accustomed to keep a register of their parent's dealings with them, and test his love by its figures. Souls that have learnt to concentrate all their desires in the cry, "Thy will be done!" and to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"[2] cannot be measuring their Father's faithfulness and love by the number of times that some wish of

[2] Job i. 21.

theirs has been granted. They know that they have been heard and answered, when the specific petition has been denied, as certainly as when the reply has come in the very shape of the request. In truth, the petitions to which alone the statistical test could in any way be applicable form a very small proportion of Christian prayer, and are precisely that part of it which is the least definite, and urged with the least insistance. Those who pray in the spirit, after the example of Christ, sweep the whole scale of the soul's wants, and besiege with their supplications the treasury of God's inexhaustible grace; but, when it is for some bodily mercy or temporal succour that they ask, their tone sinks into humble diffidence, and they suggest rather than entreat, scarcely desirous of framing a definite wish, and earnest only to leave the matter with implicit confidence to the divine wisdom. How shall the tabulated results of the arithmetician gauge the efficacy of such prayers as these, or distinguish from them the formal, selfish, untrustful prayers, to which no blessing is promised?

The appeal is to experience, and to experience let us go. Only let it be to Christian experience, as alone trustworthy in this matter of the spiritual life. And here there can be no mistake about the answer. Wherever there has been a

praying Christian, there has been a believer in the efficacy of prayer. No genuine child of God doubts that the Father hears and answers him. Tell him that statistical tables render it very doubtful whether prayer has any power with God, and he will reply, that the effects of prayer are not phenomena to be registered, but spiritual experiences to be felt in the inmost sanctuary of the soul; and that there he is daily conscious of them, as he holds communion with the Father in heaven. What the outside world styles the failures of prayer are no failures to the believer, but God's modes of answering it. St. Paul prayed thrice that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him; and when the only answer given was, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness," so far from complaining that his prayer was ineffectual, and that Christ's promises to prayer had failed, he exclaimed, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."[3] Christ Himself prayed that the cup might pass from Him, and that His people might be one, and neither petition was answered in any way that the scientific observer could note and register; yet could He say to His Father, "I knew that Thou hearest Me always,"[4] and with

[3] Cor. xii. 9, 10 [4] John xi. 42.

unabated confidence exclaim with His last breath, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."[5] It has been after the same manner that Christians have always reckoned. The promises to prayer have stood on perpetual record, and, from the Apostles' times downwards, have inspired countless prayers, which from age to age have ascended to heaven from all orders and ranks in the Church militant here upon earth. Here have been opportunities beyond number for convicting prayer of fruitlessness, and exploding it as a superstition; yet it survives in unwasted vigour, and continues to be poured upwards in undiminished volume. Every generation of believers in turn has practised it with an assurance which has known no faltering, and has set a new seal on the bold saying of the Apostle, whose heart beat in the closest harmony with the mind of God, —"This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."[6]

In conclusion, then, we come back with unabated trust to the statement, that to the filial of heart prayer justifies itself. Let the doubter,

[5] Luke xxiii. 46. [6] 1 John v. 14, 15.

instead of questioning and raising difficulties on the outside, draw within the sacred circle of child-like confidence, submission, and harmony with the Father's mind, and pour out his desires as one who really believes in the infinite Wisdom and Love; and the perplexities of the critical intellect will vanish away. Difficulties about prayer are best solved by praying. They cannot exist in the atmosphere of spiritual affection; there is no place for them in the heart which from its depths utters the simple cry, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

VI.

THE PROPHETIC CHARACTER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

"To Him give all the prophets witness."—ACTS x. 43.

THE sentiment expressed in these words may be said to pervade the whole of the New Testament. Alike in the narrative and didactic portions of that sacred volume,—alike in its sketches of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, in its accounts of His teaching, in its reports of the discourses of the missionaries who spread His religion, and in its collection of the writings by which they built up the churches in His faith and doctrine,—we find Jesus Christ set forth as no new, strange, or isolated Personage, who arose on the world unexpected and unannounced; but as One whose way had been prepared from the beginning,—One to whom divinely-commissioned servants of God had long been pointing forwards and bearing testimony,—One whose Person and work and office had been foreshadowed by in-

timations, figures, types, predictive hints of one kind and another, reiterated from age to age; so that when at last He came, He might be at once recognised as the Completion of the divine purposes, the Fulfilment of the prophecies and promises, the Centre to which all the past dealings of God conveyed, the long expected, long hoped for, Deliverer and King of the human race.

I. Now looking at this feature of the New Testament in connection with the debate over the claim of Christianity to be received as a divine religion, the first thought which naturally occurs to the mind is this,—that if the case be as it is there put, in regard to the long line of prophetic testimony which is said to have prepared the way for Christ and heralded His coming, Christianity is thereby removed out of the category of merely human growths and inventions, and is stamped with a supernatural sign and impress. Things which have been entirely the products of unassisted human genius and endeavour have never been known to have such a root as this in the Past. They may have been led up to by previous lines of thought, discovery, or achievement; indistinct preludes or anticipations of them may be found to have vaguely foreshadowed their appearance; for the

course of humanity is a growth, and its Present springs out of its Past. But that anything which is wholly of man should for ages before its manifestation have been the subject of a long line of predictions,—should have been prefigured by typical institutions, personages, and events, and have drawn to itself by anticipation the aspirations and hopes of mankind, so that when in the fulness of time it came upon the stage of the world it filled the mould which had been thus prepared for it, and stood forth as the embodiment of what successive generations of mankind had been taught to desire and expect, —this is a thing unheard of in all the annals of our race, and inexplicable by any known principle of human development. If such, then, be the case, as the New Testament affirms, with the religion of Christ, we cannot but hold it to stand apart by itself from the ordinary natural growths of human thought and speculation, and to bear on its front the signature of God.

Not, indeed, that this kind of evidence can be considered absolutely necessary to establish the claim of a religion to be from heaven. We can imagine the true Christ coming unheralded, unpredicted, and yet by indisputable proofs of divine mission and authority taking the hearts of men as if by storm, and enthroning Himself

in their consciences as the Lord to whom their allegiance was rightly due. We can imagine Christianity springing into existence without previous preparation or announcement, as an entirely new and unexpected birth of Time, and yet being marked by such features, and producing such credentials, as to leave no room for doubt of its divine origin. A messenger need not be the less authorised, nor a gospel the less authentic, because neither had been foretold, and for neither had any antecedent preparation been made. We may go even further, and say that it might still be possible for Christianity to make out its claim to be accepted as divine, even though it could be shown that its first preachers were mistaken in tracing a preparation for it in the Past, and claiming for it a basis in prophecies which did not find any real fulfilment in its story. Infallibility in the promulgators can scarcely be held to be essential to the truth of the doctrine which they are commissioned to declare. Supposing, then, that it were in the power of the objectors to Christianity to dislodge it from the basis claimed for it in the preceding dispensations of the divine wisdom, and to make out that the ancient Scriptures were wrested from their true meaning by the writers of the New Testament, to fit them

to the Christian story and doctrine, Christianity would still be far from being proved a delusion, or reduced to a merely human institution. Weakened no doubt it would be, and deprived of one great support, but others might remain which would still have to be dealt with by the unbeliever. It is certain that those who have accepted the Christian faith did not accept it solely because of the witness borne to it by the prophetical Scriptures; that witness was but one reason among many. If that were silenced, sufficient evidence to satisfy them of the divineness of their religion could still be found in the wonderful story of its birth and progress, in the beneficence of its effects, in its answer to the deepest questionings of the human spirit, in the witness borne to its truth by the experience of the souls to whom it has brought peace and hope. Here are supports which would continue unshaken, even if it were deprived of the corroboration which believers have always found in the testimony of God's prophets since the dawn of revelation. The argument, then, from prophecy, although in the highest degree forcible if satisfactorily established, cannot be justly deemed indispensable. Made good in all its bearings, it fairly carries Christianity with it; but overthrown, if it could be overthrown, it would leave Christianity,

though deprived of one support, still standing, still strong, and ready to sustain other and even fiercer assaults.

II. But if to establish the witness of prophecy to Christianity be a thing not absolutely necessary to faith, to demolish and get rid of it altogether is absolutely necessary to unbelief; and this leads on to a second thought which concerns the largeness and difficulty of the enterprise thus thrown on the sceptic. For it is no less than to empty the entire Old Testament of that onlooking, prophetic element which gives it its unity and special character. The two volumes of the Scriptures have an intimate relation to each other. If the New Testament avowedly looks back to the Old, and finds there the root out of which it grows and the basis on which it rests, the Old Testament is always pointing onwards, confessing itself incomplete, fixing its gaze (so to speak) on the distant future, and striving towards a fulfilment of its characteristic aspirations and presentiments. Thus between the two parts of Revelation there is the bond of expectancy and fruition, of preparation and consummation; and this bond, which binds together the two dispensations of Judaism and Christianity in a single great scheme of religious development, is what scepticism undertakes to

dissolve. To effect this separation it will not be enough to tear asunder a connecting link here or there, to explain away the force of this passage or of that, or to find other than Christian interpretations for a score or two of the predictions of which the fulfilment has been seen in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Such successes as those would at the utmost but touch the surface of the question; for they would affect nothing more than a mere fragment of the evidence of relation and correspondence, and would leave unimpaired alike the ingrained prophetical element of the Old Testament, and the answering element of fulfilment with which the New is impregnated throughout. Nor could a triumph for scepticism be secured by any possible success in the attempt to account for Christianity by a conscious purpose, on the part of those who originated it, to give it a supernatural aspect by moulding it on the lines supplied by the older Scriptures. To say nothing of the impracticability of explaining the form and growth of Christianity by that supposition, the peculiar onlooking character of the Old Testament, and the organic, continuous development of the dispensation which it records, would still remain without the smallest adequate explanation. Why that steadfast progress, that

mighty course of education, that fostering of an ever enlarging conception and hope of a divine kingdom, through two thousand years of conflict and discipline, if there were no fore-ordained future to which all was ever moving on under divine guidance and inspiration? To the life and growth of the Hebrew nation, to the impress stamped upon it by its mystic institutions, and the progress made by it under its prophetical instructors, there was no parallel elsewhere; and when we look back, and discern how that elect and consecrated people stood forth in the world as the one great witness for righteousness, the one persistent embodiment of hope for mankind, it seems impossible, at least without rejecting altogether the idea of God's disposing government of the world, to deny that the wonderful course and development of Judaism had a real and purposed onlook to the Christianity for which it undeniably made ready the way.

If this be so,—that is, if the prophetic element be so transfused through the very substance of the older Scriptures, and so embodied in the history of the Hebrew nation,—sceptical writers must be unwarrantably sanguine in thinking that they have succeeded in overthrowing the testimony borne by the Old Testament to Christianity, when to their own satisfaction they have emptied

a certain number of passages in the prophetical writings of a direct and exclusive reference to specific incidents of the Gospel narrative. To raise a shout of triumph over so small an achievement, as if Christianity were trembling to its overthrow, is as if the iconoclast, bent on the destruction of some magnificent statue which has survived the wear and tear of ages, should boast that his work was accomplished when he had succeeded in inflicting a few scratches on its polished surface.

III. We may now go on to meet the sceptical writers on their own ground, and examine how far their line of argument is capable of conducting us towards the conclusion which they endeavour to reach. Their argument may be fairly exhibited in the following form:—

"The ancient prophets," it is urged, "as the religious teachers of their nation, would by the very nature of their office be concerned with the actual circumstances around them, and would deal forth encouragements and promises, reproofs and threatenings, with direct and exclusive reference to the state of the persons whom they addressed. A Hebrew prophet was, above all things, a practical man, a man of intense earnestness and reality. To suppose that such a man, in the very heat and thick of his witness for

righteousness and his conflicts with faithlessness and irreligion, would turn aside from the living present to utter words, or to pen predictions, which had no significance for his own time, and could be applicable only to the distant future, would be to introduce into our conception of his character and office an element foreign to its nature, out of harmony with the constitution of things, and unsupported by any trustworthy evidence. Look," it is added, "at the historical circumstances of each prophet and his times; examine critically his recorded utterances, and you will find that they bear out to the fullest extent this view of the prophetical function. You will perceive that the thoughts of the prophet were entirely occupied with the conduct and fortunes of the people around him, and that even when his mind was looking forward into the future, it was the future as it lay immediately before him on which alone his attention was fixed. Whatever predictions, then, proceeded from him must be understood as limited to, and exhausted by, events bearing on his own times and his own contemporaries; and to tear them away from that immediate application, and transfer them to the remote times of the New Testament, must consequently be to make an unnatural use of them, for which there is no foundation in the prophecies themselves."

Now with the general position here taken up, namely, that the prophets spoke for their own times, and that their words when predictive had respect to a future which was immediately connected with those times, the Christian expositor of the prophecies has no need to disagree. In regard to a large number of the Messianic prophecies a primary contemporary application is admitted by all; and the Christian argument would suffer no damage from an extension of this rule of interpretation to every prophecy without exception, if on critical grounds a fair case could be made out for it. All that is necessary for the argument is to show that the immediate and contemporary reference or meaning need not be the only one; that these prophecies, which in their primary intention may have pointed to a future close at hand, or to hopes of a purely national kind, may still have possessed a force and a meaning unexhausted by that reference, and pointing on more vaguely, and yet with a real application, to a distant and grander future. To say that Hebrew prophecy always had an immediate and national purport is one thing; to assert that it never meant anything over and above that, and was limited to and exhausted in that primary application, is quite another. It is this second assertion alone which the Christian

advocate is concerned to disprove; and it is to be remarked, that while a critical examination of the terms and circumstances of a prophecy may accurately fix its original reference, and show plainly its contemporary fulfilment, no such examination can possibly determine that it is destitute of any further meaning, any inner mysterious significance reaching forwards to a future dispensation. That is a question which must be otherwise settled, by a wider survey of the course of the divine dealings, and a drinking into the spirit of the great scheme of revelation.

For as soon as we admit the idea that God, in the Past, was progressively revealing Himself by a long course of historical manifestations of His will and purpose, and gradually working out by means of the Jewish nation a great scheme of redeeming interposition, it becomes easy to conceive how smaller events might be made types and preludes of grander ones to come, and how the uses of the prophetical teaching might thus stretch beyond the primary occasion to shadow forth higher ends and awaken nobler hopes. Viewed as a means of gradual preparation for Christ, and training for the Gospel, sacred prophecy may be taken as having both a letter and a spirit, a body and a soul; the letter, the body, belonging to Judaism; the spirit, the soul, to

Christianity. We may conceive of a Messianic meaning lying in it as the spiritual meaning lies in the parable; we may reverently ascribe to the Spirit, who spake by the prophets, such an overruling and guidance of their utterances, as to make them transcend the immediate occasion or national interest, and by an undertone of heightened aspiration and more spiritual hope, by mysterious hints and presages of richer blessings in the future, swell the tide of expectation from age to age, until the world was ready for the solution of the great enigma of Hope, in the manifestation of the Christ of God, the Redeemer of mankind.

IV. Now that this enlarged sense, this additional undercurrent of meaning, may fairly and without violence be attributed to those portions of the prophetical Scriptures which are more especially called Messianic, even though they may be proved by critical investigation to apply primarily to incidents connected with their own times or of merely national interest, the circumstances of the whole case seem sufficiently to point out. The justification of this mode of viewing them is supplied partly by the prophecies themselves, and partly by the course of events in which they are embedded. Let us endeavour to trace it out in a candid spirit.

And, first, let us notice that the Messianic prophecies, as they stand on record in the Old Testament, bear to an observant eye somewhat of a peculiar and mysterious aspect. Each is interwoven with the history, the circumstances, the feelings of its own time; the ideas and hopes which they express are clothed in a national garb, a local colour and adornment; they seem more or less distinctly to refer to immediately expected events, and certainly, in many cases, we are able to detect the connection and fulfilment. But, when we have interpreted them by these indications, we find them still far from being thoroughly explained and accounted for; we have not got to the bottom of them; they transcend our application of them, and present an unexhausted remainder. Their language runs beyond and swells above the events to which we have fitted them, and the national expectations which we have traced in them; they glow with a warmth which is mysteriously great; something remoter and grander seems to be animating them, breathing in them, obscurely looming through them; without losing their hold on what is present or near, they impress the mind with a vague sense of more being intended, of greater things to come being shadowed forth and dimly presented in hope.

This impression of some mystery lying beneath the surface is rendered all the stronger by the reiteration, the persistence, the gradual amplification of the ideas which appear to struggle in them for expression; as we pass from prophecy to prophecy a feeling of expectation grows in us, and we seem to be borne along on some mighty current of hope towards a consummation yet hidden in the counsels of God. Such is the suggestive, mysterious, aspect of the prophecies themselves, as they lie before us in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures.

For the fuller explanation of what all this means, we must go on to take a comprehensive survey of the great historical sequence in which the authors of these prophecies played a leading part. Looking back to the beginning, we see Judaism rising out of the primitive forms of religion, and gradually developing itself, under the influence of the prophetical teaching, in the line of purer and more spiritual conceptions of God and of righteousness, always bearing on its front the aspect of progress, and embodying the hope of a better future, a more perfect revelation, a closer fellowship with God. Then out of the midst of Judaism in its maturity we see Jesus Christ coming forth as He in whom all things were to be fulfilled and com-

pleted; the Man above all men, the Prophet above all prophets, the consummate Flower of our race, the Regenerator of the world, the Founder of a new and universal kingdom of the spirit. And, lastly, growing out of His work, as His creation and instrument, we see Christianity, embodied in the visible Church, setting out on its march of peaceful conquest, and gradually renewing and filling the civilised world,—a dispensation transcending Judaism as far as Judaism transcended the earlier religions, yet incorporating all that was choicest and most spiritual in Judaism, completing its imperfect revelations, and fulfilling its noblest aspirations.

Such is the mighty sequence, stretching across the ages, which lies before our gaze, a sequence the vastest, the most glorious and fruitful in the world's story, paling all other growths and developments of the human race as the rising sun pales the stars of the night. We contemplate it till our minds are possessed with its divine greatness and lustre; and, having observed how all its parts cohere together, and its advance has been continuous through all the conflict and fluctuation from its dawn in the remote Past down to our own days, and has not even yet reached its end, but is still full of bright promise for the future, we go back

to the ancient prophecies which we found standing as signposts along the path of Judaism, to see if they do not now start forth into a new light, and gleam with a fresh significance. Surely now we shall understand why they appeared to labour with an untold secret, and to carry on our minds in a state of expectancy beyond their first and obvious meaning. The mysterious glow which we observed upon them was caught from the far distant brightness of Christianity; the mightier hope which strove to utter itself in them was an inarticulate anticipation of the Gospel. If around national heroes and expected deliverers prophetic strains were woven, which sounded disproportionate and inflated; it was because in those strains there was a vague reaching forth to the divine Redeemer, of whom those champions of the nation were suggestive shadows and typical preludes. If the calling and work, the sorrows and triumphs of the ancient servants of the Lord, or of the ideal Israel of His choice, were delineated with a grandeur and pathos of which actual realities seemed to afford no sufficient justification; it was because underneath the delineation lay the hint of a diviner theme, even the office and conflict of the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession, in whom all service and

sacrifice, all witness for righteousness and patient triumph over evil, reached their fullest perfection and glory.

It is thus that the Christian interpretation of Old Testament prophecy in general appears to be best vindicated; not by denying the primary and more literal application of prophecy to contemporary events or immediate national expectations, but by tracing in it something more, an undercurrent of higher meaning, lying beneath the surface, and swelling as it rolls along until it finds its realisation in Christianity. When we read the ancient Scriptures with this key in our hands, their secret seems to be deciphered, their riddle solved. The prophets truly spoke to the fears and hopes of their own time; but they did more,—they also prepared the way of the Lord. Their messages were in the first instance for their own nation, and dealt with its present and pressing interests; but for the world at large they presaged the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, and the wider blessings of the Gospel. As we follow their teaching from age to age, the conviction grows upon us that prophecy is not a thing of private interpretation, or limited to the passing interests of a single people. Its letter, its primary and external aspect, might be of Israel and for Israel,

but in spirit it reaches further and embraces the world; for whether under the old dispensation of shadows, or the new dispensation of the substance, under all the forms of divine guidance and instruction, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

V. It is true that the line of argument, by which we have been endeavouring to vindicate the prophetic witness of the Old Testament to Christianity, against the objections raised by sceptical criticism, addresses itself partly to the heart, and needs for its appreciation some degree of spiritual sensibility and discernment. It has not the external, palpable force of miracle or prodigy; it does not strike the imagination with surprise, or compel a reluctant assent, as exact fulfilments of precise predictions might do, when, after an interval of many centuries, events come to pass which fit the prophetic description as the bronze statue fits the mould into which the metal has been poured, and yet could neither have been foreseen by human sagacity, nor brought about by human contrivance. But the kind of evidence which we have been reviewing is not the less in harmony with the general tenour and character of Christianity, because it appeals to the spiritual sensibilities, and asks for a candid, truth-loving disposition. God's method has not

been to force His truth upon us by the overwhelming attestation of prodigies, nor, indeed, would an assent enforced by such means be likely to purify the moral affections, or fit the soul for communion with God. If unbelievers disdain the evidence which speaks to earnest, seeking hearts, and demand something more startling, more materialistic, savouring more of the wonderful and miraculous; if they cry, "Show us precise, indisputable, downright predictions, which have been to the letter fulfilled in conspicuous events utterly beyond the range of human prevision or contrivance, and then we will believe;" we can remember that this is no new kind of demand, but the mere repetition of one which is very old, and which God has not been pleased to satisfy. When the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to Israel as the very incarnation of divine truth and grace, His Person, His words, His actions all beaming with the light of heaven, so that every one who was "of the truth" was irresistibly convinced that He had "the words of eternal life," and was indeed "the Christ, the Son of the living God;" there were still many who looked on, cold and incredulous, and demanded a sign from heaven, some flashing prodigy in the sky, before they would acknowledge His mission and become His

followers. As it was then with those men of carnal hearts, so has it been with too many since, even down to the present day; and that, not only in regard to the claims of Christianity, but with reference even to the very first rudiment of religion, the belief in God. While to the spiritual eye the heavens declare His glory, and all Nature is radiant with the brightness of His presence, and to the spiritual ear His great name is whispered by sun and stars, by winds and waters, by all the beautiful garniture and all the bountiful provision of the physical world, there are hearts so blind and deaf as to perceive nothing of all this witness of a supernatural Presence and glory, and in the absence of more material and palpable demonstration, such as can be reduced to syllogisms or exhibited to the bodily senses, to cry out, "God is nowhere to be found; there is no God!"

Hence, if we would form a just estimate of the force of the evidence with which Christianity offers itself to our acceptance, it is of the highest importance to remember that Christianity is, above all things, a religion of the heart and spirit, and addresses itself primarily to the spiritual faculty within each of us; not by startling prodigies and visible appeals to the senses, nor by rigorous demonstrations submitted to the

logical faculty, but by the still small voice which thrills the humble heart with a sense of the divine presence, and brings with it a divine gift of purity, peace, and strength. It would be in vain that prodigies were showered, or demonstrations lavished, on the cold, the careless, and the sensual; no faith could be created by such instrumentality, no heart converted. For the enquirer to demand, or the apologist of Christianity to be content with offering such proofs as these of our holy religion, would betray a complete misconception of the basis on which it rests, and the grounds on which it claims our trust. What says the divine Master Himself? "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." If any man will do His will;—will set himself with singlehearted resolve and conscientious endeavour to practise that which is right; to follow truth, purity, and goodness; to be in his daily conduct upright, unselfish, humble, seeking wisdom from above, and laying his heart open to divine influences and guidance;—he shall know of the doctrine. It will come into his heart with power; it will commend itself to his faculty of spiritual discernment, and win his confidence, and make him feel that it is of God, and that God is in it of a truth. Such is the

divine method by which conviction is attained and faith engendered in the soul.

Come, then, in this frame of mind to the witness which Old Testament prophecy bears to Christ, and you will not complain of its inconclusiveness because it does not display before you predictions which startle and overpower the mind by their astonishing preciseness and accuracy, and is not adapted to bring unhumbled sensual doubters down to their knees before the Cross by an irresistible compulsion. Rather, you will be satisfied to discover that it is in harmony with the general tenour of God's other appeals to the hearts of mankind, in being a voice from the Spirit of truth to the conscience, the spiritual faculty, by which alone God can be apprehended. And, listening to it in this mental readiness to hear, it will be strange if you do not find it sufficient to confirm your faith in your Redeemer. Surely, as its varied prefigurations, its prophetical types, its spiritual aspirations and gracious promises, pass before you, Jesus Christ and His redeeming power and love will be brought closer to your souls. His atoning sacrifice, His prophetical office, His universal kingdom of grace, His salvation begun here in every loyal soul, and awaiting its sure consummation in the freedom and power of the life to come,—these, all

these, will seem to spring forth from the prophetic pages, and to irradiate them with a divine brightness; and with renewed assurance and joy you will exclaim, "We have found the Messias; for to Him give all the prophets witness; and the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

VII.

THE PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER OF REVELATION.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels."—2 Cor. iv. 7.

Although there is some uncertainty as to the precise origin of this metaphor, in which an allusion has been seen by some to the lights in Gideon's pitchers,[1] and by others, with perhaps greater probability, to an Eastern custom of either carrying or storing up gold, silver, and jewels in earthenware jars, there can be no doubt respecting the idea which it was employed to illustrate. The Apostle believed that God had committed to him a revelation of divine truth, a message of reconciliation, a good news of eternal life; and this knowledge, this Gospel, was esteemed by him an inestimable treasure, which had been intrusted to his keeping, not for his own use or advantage only, but for the purpose of communicating it to others also, that they might be enriched with the heavenly and everlasting riches. But of this divine trea-

[1] Judges vii. 16.

sure he felt himself to be but a feeble, frail receptacle; he held it "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling;"[2] in a mind which was often troubled and perplexed; in a bodily frame which was fast wearing out, and already marked for death. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," he pathetically cried; precious as it is above all worldly possessions, it is committed for keeping to the coarse, fragile clay of our imperfect, decaying humanity.

What St. Paul here says of his own ministry of the Gospel may be taken, I think, as typical of the whole method of divine revelation. The knowledge which God has been pleased from time to time to impart to mankind of Himself, His will, and His ways,—the whole unfolding within the human consciousness of the divine thought and purpose,—is the noblest, most precious treasure which men are capable of receiving. But it has evermore been God's method to commit this treasure to human receptacles; to intrust it to human instruments; to distribute it through human channels; and, thus, divine as it is in its origin and its substance, to make us partakers of it through an intermediate agency, which for its frailty and imperfection may be described by the figure of "earthen vessels."

[2] 1 Cor. ii. 3.

This is the idea which it shall be my endeavour to illustrate, with a view to show how it may help and guide us through the difficulties which sceptical criticism finds in the conception of the Bible as the record of God's revelations of Himself to mankind.

I. It is from the Bible that we learn what revelation is, what course it has followed, and to what completeness it has attained. And it is the Biblical representation of revelation which alone we are concerned to justify. Other ideas of revelation than that which the Bible conveys may be left by us to shift for themselves, and to perish, if it must be, under the attacks of criticism. The truth is not concerned in their fate. Our appeal is to the Bible, and the Bible alone.

How does the Bible present revelation to us? That will be best answered by considering the order and method of the Bible itself; for it is the contemporaneous record of each stage of revelation, the expression in each age of what mankind had been given to know of the will and way of God. Practically, then, we shall find the order and method of revelation mirrored in the order and method of the sacred Volume.

We must try, therefore, to obtain a just conception of the Bible, in order to see by what

steps God manifested Himself to His human children. And we shall best do this by dismissing from our minds for a time the various theories which have been formed about the inspiration, the infallibility, the supernatural character of the Bible, and endeavouring simply to see Holy Scripture by its own light. It puts forth no theory about itself; it nowhere defines the nature or limits of its inspiration, or the manner in which divine communications from time to time entered the sphere of human thought and expression, or the degree in which they were modified by their passage through the human agents who were commissioned to convey them to the world. The Bible lays before us the facts upon which any theory of its origin and nature must be founded; but whatever theories about it may be formed,—and several are current among theologians,—they are but the results of the efforts made by the human mind to gather up the facts under some general rule, or to explain them by some controlling principle. To look at the Bible through any of these theories is only to see it at second-hand, or through a medium which is likely more or less to distort its features, and to impair the accuracy of our perception of its characteristics. Really, therefore, to understand what the Bible is, to discern its nature,

and obtain a just idea of its order and method, we must venture to put aside the theories which have been framed about it, and to look at it with honest, open eyes for ourselves. This let us endeavour briefly to do.

Examining the Bible for ourselves, we are immediately cognisant of several very important features in its structure. It is not a single book, but almost a library of books collected together in a certain order. It is not all of a single age, but has been the product of a long succession of ages, the several parts of it having come into existence at intervals which together span perhaps as much as fifteen centuries. And what is especially noticeable is, that the differences of age in the successive portions have their counterparts in differences, not of style alone, but also of essential substance and character. There is, indeed, a unity observable throughout it, but it is a unity of growth, not a uniformity of matter. If we compare the two great divisions of the Bible, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact, that, as to almost everything which enters into a religious creed, such as the nature and character of God, the revelation of immortality, the way of salvation, the ordinances of worship and means of grace, the rule of righteousness or conception of morality, and the promise of eternal

life, there is a wide difference between the Old Testament and the New. It is a difference of the same kind as those between a rough sketch and a finished picture; between rudimentary lessons and perfect science; between vague shadows and solid realities; between distant approximation and complete coincidence. No one, who has any fair acquaintance with the sacred writings, could possibly mistake a chapter of the New Testament for a portion of the Old; to throw back the teaching of St. Paul or St. John into the times of the kings of Israel, would be to create an intolerable and instantly detected anachronism. Nor is it only between the two chief divisions of the Bible that a decided contrast exists; within the limits of the Old Testament itself are found differences which are just as plainly discernible, if not so great, as those which distinguish the Christian from the Jewish Scriptures. In their conceptions of the character of God, and of the worship and service which He accepts; in their teaching about the laws of morality and the obligations of obedience; in their aspirations for a spiritual fellowship, and their intuitive anticipations of the life to come, the later prophets and psalmists of Israel were manifestly far in advance of the Law, with its carnal ordinances, narrow spirit, and silence about a future life; just as that

again was itself a great step in advance beyond the unorganised, formless religion which preceded it. It is to be noted, too, that these differences are even greater than a merely superficial view might lead us to imagine. Where we find the same terms used both by earlier and later writers, we are apt to think that the meanings are identical, or that the conceptions underlying the terms are precisely the same; but a little reflection will lead us to perceive that, in the case of different epochs and different stages of development, sameness of expression by no means carries with it identity of thought. As ideas and conceptions rise to a greater elevation, they bear up the meaning of the words with them, enlarge their application, and make them contain higher truths than before. This is a necessary feature of progress, and cannot fail to be recognised by any one who intelligently compares the earlier and later portions of the Bible. For instance, that God is a *holy* God is equally the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel; but, in the long interval between the two, the meaning of the epithet, its force and scope and intensity, has evidently risen as much as the morality of the Sermon on the Mount has risen above the narrow formalism of the Law. And so it is generally with the successive developments of religion

during the long ages covered by the Old Testament; much of the earlier language is carried on and reproduced in the later teaching, but religion had not stood still, nor revelation ceased to unfold itself; from time to time the language came to bear a higher signification, in proportion as the revealing Spirit carried forward His work in the heart, and enabled men to entertain higher conceptions of divine things.

Forming our idea of the Bible from these obvious features which stand prominently out on its face, we draw the conclusion that the sacred Volume is by no means on the same level from beginning to end, or all of a piece throughout, as if it were the production of a single mind at a definite stage of development and knowledge; on the contrary, it is characterised by an almost continuous ascent from lower to higher levels, by a gradual progress or growth in everything which pertains to man's moral and spiritual culture. It presents itself to us as a collection of records of the successive steps of a divine course of instruction, which advanced in proportion as men were able to learn; which at first was lowered and accommodated to their ignorance and grossness of conception, and by degrees advanced to higher lessons, and led them, step by step, to worthier conceptions of God, of religion,

and of righteousness. In fact, the Bible may be said to mirror almost the entire religious growth of our race. The toleration of many an imperfect idea, or gross practice, which we cannot help perceiving in its earlier portions, is seen to have been but temporary, and to have gradually given place to higher standards of conduct, and more spiritual thoughts of God. With the lapse of time, and the advance of religious ideas, the letter makes room for the spirit; morality is elevated, worship is refined, the inward takes the place of the outward. So that, reviewing the Bible as a whole, we find that, instead of beginning at the same level at which it ends, or teaching from the same point throughout, it exhibits a steady progress and ascent in its lessons, and represents God's method of revelation as characterised by a continuous development of divine truth and righteousness, in the sphere of human knowledge, morality, and worship.

This great feature of the Bible is not only implicitly contained in its structure, but expressly declared in not a few of its pages. We have not been left to discover it for ourselves, but have had our attention directed to it by many a passage, in which it figures as an important element in the divine dealings with our race. When, for instance, the psalmists and prophets of the later

days of Israel employ language which throws a certain discredit on the ceremonial materialism of the more primitive times, and summon the people to purer conceptions of God, and of the worship which is acceptable to Him; when they speak of God as having formerly given to Israel "statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;"[3] when they hold out the promise of a "new covenant,"[4] with better promises and more spiritual gifts than any which belonged to the covenant which was passing away; in all this teaching, which is repeated in many shapes, they are plainly affirming the gradual advance of revelation from less to more perfect forms, from a rudimentary to a more highly developed stage. Still more plainly is the same fact announced in the New Testament. Here we find "grace and truth"[5] coming to bring that which could not be found in the law; here "the letter which killeth" makes way for "the spirit which giveth life;"[6] here the "shadow of good things to come"[7] is replaced by the substance; and the old, intolerable bondage under "the rudiments"[8] and "weak and beggarly elements"[9] of the older dispensation is exchanged for the freedom of the children of God. Every inspired

[3] Ezek. xx. 25. [4] Jer. xxxi. 31—34. [5] John i. 17.
[6] 2 Cor. iii. 6, 7. [7] Heb. x. 1. [8] Col. ii. 8. [9] Gal. iv. 9.

exposition of the nature and blessings of the New Covenant, from the divine Master's Sermon on the Mount down to the beloved disciple's witness at the close of the sacred Canon, represents it as characterised by a new order of divine dealing, a more spiritual worship, a higher righteousness, a fuller manifestation of truth, a nearer vision of God. Here revelation seems at last to have shaken off the bonds and incumbrances which had from the beginning disguised its features and impeded its movements, and to have exhibited itself in its full proportions and undimmed beauty; so that we whose lot is cast in the blessed age of grace have entered on an inheritance of truth "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,"[1] and have been permitted "with open face" to behold "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[2]

The progressive character of the revelations which the Bible records appears, therefore, to be expressly affirmed in its own words, as well as to be patent in its structure and order. But we may go even further, and add, that this peculiar feature is by no means an arbitrary or superficial one, but grew out of a necessity of human nature, and was absolutely required in

[1] Eph. iii. 5. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 18; iv. 6.

order to fit revelation for the purpose which it was intended to accomplish. For if divine teaching was really to enter into and lay hold of human minds, it needed first to be embodied in their language, and brought down to the level of their faculties. The lower it originally found them, the lower it must have been compelled to stoop, to gain an entrance into their thoughts, and win over their intelligence to its truths. If their language was at first gross and material, which we know was the case, it could have been in that language only that spiritual ideas were first expressed. So long as human nature is what it is, not even the divinest, most supernatural teaching could dispense with the need of suiting the lesson to the intelligence and capacity of the learner. Hence it could only have been as mankind grew in the power of apprehension and in spiritual culture, that the instruction which they were capable of receiving could rise into higher and more spiritual strains. The earliest revelations must have been the most imperfect and meagre, and time and growth alone could prepare the way for more advanced instruction. And what was true of revelation must be true of the Bible, if it be, as it manifestly is, a contemporary record of the successive stages of divine teaching. Here, too, the earliest lessons will be

those which are the most lowered and accommodated to human ignorance and infirmity; step by step they will rise in scope and character, keeping pace with the unfolding intelligence and increasing receptivity of man under this divine education; and the latest will be the highest, the most spiritual, the most accordant with God's eternal truth and righteousness. And so in fact, as it has been already said, we find it to have been. At the beginning the stream, so to speak, of divine communications to mankind ran shallow and scanty and mixed with impurities; but with the lapse of time it grew in volume and brightness, till it rolled triumphantly along as "the river of God, which is full of water,"[3] even as "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."[4]

II. Such is the conception of God's method of revealing Himself to mankind which we derive from the Bible itself. There is, perhaps, a difficulty in the way of frankly accepting it, growing out of the contrariety which at the first glance it seems to exhibit to what we might have expected from the infinite perfection of God; and it is well to consider this before we pass on to the application.

For, when the absolutely perfect truth, purity,

[3] Ps. lxv. 9. [4] Rev. xxii. 1.

and righteousness of the eternal Father are present to our thoughts, and we recognise with holy awe that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all,"[5] it is not unnatural for us to form to ourselves a very different conception of what revelation must have been, or is likely to have been, from this which lies before us in the Bible. Could a God of perfect holiness and truth, we might ask, condescend to teach His children by imperfect dispensations, half-truths, twilight adumbrations of the spiritual realities? Could He tolerate, even for a ime, a lower, imperfect morality as a stepping-stone to a higher and fuller righteousness? or prescribe a carnal and sensuous worship, as a temporary mould in which slowly to fashion men's hearts for the offerings of the spirit? Could He bring down the manifestations of Himself to meet half-way the ignorant or superstitious minds to which His word first was sent, and await their gradual unfolding to make Himself known in the undimmed brightness of His perfections? Must not every syllable, every lesson, every law and institution, which proceeded from Him, or was put forth under His sanction, have been radiant with unmixed truth and goodness, just as every beam from the sun consists of pure, unadulte-

[5] 1 John i. 5.

rated light? And, as we asked such questions as these, revelation might shape itself ideally in our thoughts as some glorious external manifestation of celestial truth, in which no degrees were possible, no obscurities, no shadows, no distant approximations or gradual unfoldings; nothing but heavenly perfection and completeness, for mankind reverently to gaze upon, to accept, and to follow, as something which in every line and every feature was of absolute perfection and imperishable authority.

No doubt, then, that in such a progressive method of revelation as that which the Old Testament sets before us, and which was carried out in the growth of Judaism, there is not a little which at first sight seems mysterious and perplexing. But, before we stumble at it, or try to get rid of the difficulty, whether by disingenuous explanations or sceptical denials, we shall do well to remember that all is mysterious in the manifestation of the Infinite in the finite, and in the dealings of God with human souls; and that the difficulty here is only part of a far larger difficulty, which it is equally impossible either to explain or to deny. If an objector says that revelation must be infinitely perfect in every part, if it be revelation at all; or that the sacred Scriptures

of Judaism must stand on the same level of infallible truth and perpetual authority as the New Testament, if they be in any sense the Word of God; for that it is inconceivable that anything imperfect, partial, rudimentary, and needing correction and improvement, should issue from the all-perfect God; let him explain how this world of ours ever became such as it is, so ignorant, so degraded, so alienated from its Maker, as to need God to come forth and reveal Himself to it, and inaugurate a method of redeeming it for Himself. Behind the mysteriousness of revelation and redemption lies the tremendous and undeniable mystery of human debasement and sinfulness. To reconcile this with the attributes of God is surely harder than to conceive of God drawing near to fallen men, as the Old Testament pourtrays Him, and beginning to teach and train them in the only way in which they were able at first to receive instruction;—by revelations which were partial and defective, by laws which were lowered in condescension to the hardness of their hearts, by dispensations which were far from "faultless"[6] and "made nothing perfect."[7] The two facts, human degradation and God's method of a progressive revelation of Himself, go toge-

[6] Heb. viii. 7. [7] Heb. vii. 19.

ther, as parts of the same mystery; and our true wisdom, as humble learners in God's school, is not to dogmatise presumptuously about what ought to have been, but to observe teachably what has been in the Past; not to pronounce how God in our opinion was bound to lead and teach His wandering children, but to learn His actual method from the historical order of His providence and grace.

III. We have now, in the last place, to notice what reply is suggested, by this view of the structure and method of the Bible, to those objections, based on its contents, which are commonly urged against its claim to be accepted as the vehicle of divine revelation.

Let us suppose a sceptical inquirer examining the Bible, to see if it answers to the title of the "Word of God," assigned to it by the whole of Christendom. For this purpose he must have in his mind some standard by which to try it, some idea about God's Word with which to bring it into comparison; and the idea which most naturally presents itself is, that every word of God must be absolutely perfect. For if God Himself be infinitely true and holy,—and no other conception of Him seems admissible,—then it might seem that every word which claims to have come from Him is bound to show itself

to be, at the least, absolutely free from error, and perfectly in accordance with the highest and purest morality. Suppose, then, the inquirer to assume this idea as his criterion, and to test the Bible by it. Going in order through its pages, we may imagine him eager to mark every statement which is inconsistent with our modern knowledge; every precept, example, or lesson of conduct which falls below the morality now accepted; every theological or religious representation which is less pure and spiritual than the doctrine of Christianity; every kind of earlier teaching which is afterwards set aside and superseded by higher and nobler lessons. To suppose his list of such things to become a very long one, is merely to ascribe to him the ordinary experience of such inquirers. And if he now draws the common sceptical conclusion, that a book in which all these things are found bears on it the palpable stamp of human thought and knowledge in their progressive stages, but does not exhibit the uniform and absolute perfection which must characterise the Word of the omniscient, all-perfect God, and therefore stands convicted of unjustly usurping the title of His Word, what shall we say to convince him that he has arrived at an erroneous result?

We may tell him, first, that his method of judging the Bible is essentially faulty, because it is egregiously incomplete. Of the chief characteristics of the Bible it takes no account; of the unparalleled power and glory of the Bible it affords no explanation. The Bible is a volume which stands by itself, without a single rival, in the story of its growth, the record of its achievements, the spiritual depth and universality of its teaching. It has ever moved in the forefront of human progress, and approved itself to the religious intuition of the most enlightened and advancing part of mankind, as conveying divine teaching, and bringing the heart into contact with the Spirit of God. As in the "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is," the work of the Almighty Creator is discerned; so in the sacred Scriptures, according to the belief of all Christendom, is heard the voice of the heavenly Father, speaking to His earthly children, and guiding them into the knowledge of Himself. These are facts of which some satisfactory account ought to be furnished, before the critic of the letter passes on the Bible his adverse verdict.

We may, further, tell him that his objections lie, not against the Bible, but only against human theories about the nature or method of

the Bible. If there be a theory which puts the entire Bible on the same uniform level of perfection, ascribing to every part supreme and final authority, and denies that it exhibits any progress from rudimentary to more advanced teaching, any accommodation of truth to imperfect intelligences, any human element or impress whatever; then to such a theory the objections, if sustained, would no doubt be fatal. But, as the Bible makes no such pretensions for itself, it escapes untouched. Taken altogether, the utmost effect of such objections can be no more than to establish that which the Bible allows about itself. For if, as we have seen, it represents its own teaching as having been conveyed through human minds and human language, and as having gradually advanced from the more elementary lessons to the fulness of grace and truth in the dispensation of the Spirit; to what more do the allegations of the objector amount, when he produces instances, numerous as they may be, in which the earlier portions seem to him to teach less perfectly, or to have about them more savour of human frailty, than the later?

Once more, we may point out the fallacy of judging the Bible by any of its separate parts, instead of taking its whole outcome and result as its real teaching. The objector challenges,

for instance, the morality sanctioned in some earlier part of the volume as being imperfect; well, supposing it to be so, that is only the morality of that portion of the Bible, not of the Bible itself. The morality of the Bible is not that which is exhibited in the patriarchs, or prescribed in the Law, or expounded by the prophets, for these were only steps in its gradual development of ethical teaching; it is the ultimate morality to which all these were leading on,—the morality of the Gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven, the morality taught in the crowning revelations of the New Testament,—that is the real morality of the Bible. And so with all its teaching, whether about the character and will of God, the sacredness of human individuality, the spirituality of true religion, the hope of eternal life; it is not the successive steps of the advancing revelations which are the real teaching of the Bible on these subjects, but the mature result reached at last, the consummate declarations to which we are gradually led on, and with which we are finally left. By these, and these alone, must the Bible be judged, for these are its real outcome, its final words, its completed teaching; to go back, and judge it by its earlier, immature portions, as if these by themselves fairly represented it, would be like

judging of a building by its unfinished walls, or of a picture by the painter's first rude sketch on the canvas.

Such is the reply which the view of revelation as progressive enables us to make to the critical sceptic. It is a reply addressed to his intellect, to show him that those things in the earlier parts of the Bible at which he stumbles, as being inconsistent with the teaching and knowledge of later times, are amply accounted for by the gradual development which the Bible itself ascribes to the course of divine revelation. To demand perfection at the outset, and all through, in a scheme which professes to attain perfection by many successive stages of growth, is not less unreasonable than to demand in the child the vigour and capacity of the full-grown man.

But I would not conclude without addressing a word to that in the sceptical enquirer which is more than intellect,—his human heart, with its mysterious wants and aspirations. Does he not know himself, in his best moments, to be capable of a rest and a joy which earthly things are powerless to bestow? Is he not conscious of possessing moral and spiritual affections which cannot be satisfied with transient objects, but crave communion with the eternal Truth and Goodness? Does he not long for a voice from

above, to clear up his perplexities, and give assurance to his hopes? Then let him deal fairly by this highest, most human, part of his nature. Let him bring it into honest, reverential contact with the Bible; not criticising the letter, but seeking to understand the spirit which breathes divine utterances through the letter. And if, while he does this with patient earnestness, as one who seeks for priceless treasures, the critical difficulties which once repelled him retire into the background, and a heavenly light seems to break on his soul, bringing with it a new life and hope and joy; then he will know for himself what it is which has endeared the Bible to all believers as the Word of God, and prompted them to look upwards with devout thankfulness, and say, "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."[8]

[8] Psalm cxix. 130.

THE END.

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